THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS

F. W. DIXON

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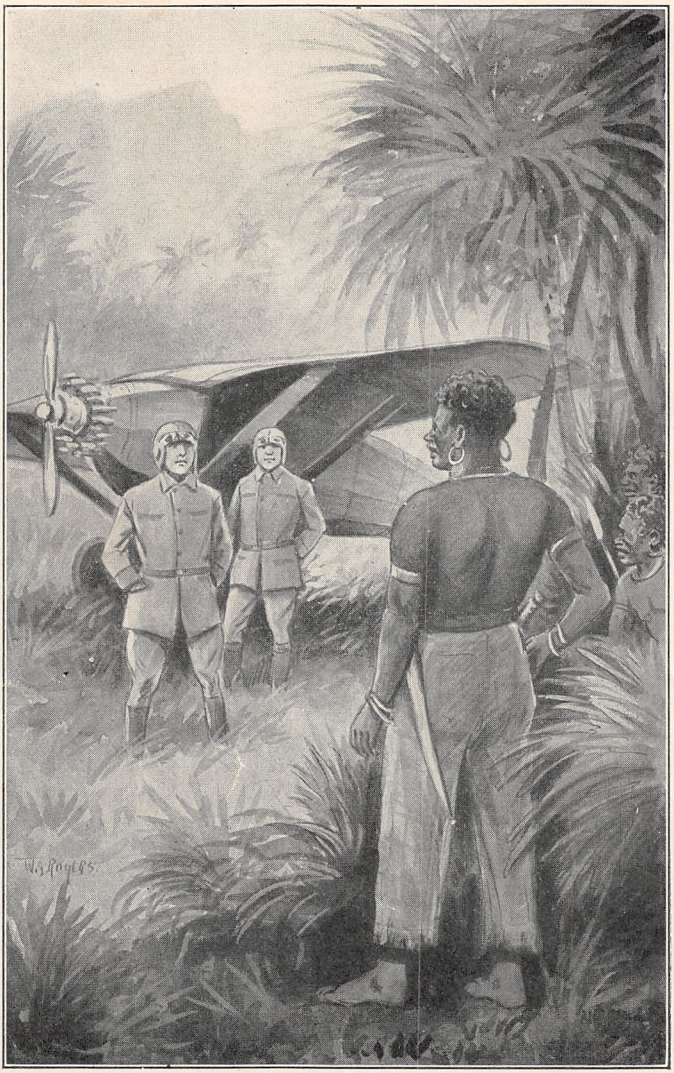

A GIGANTIC NEGRO STEPPED INTO THE CLEARING.

The Search for the Lost Flyers. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 157)

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS

OR

TED SCOTT OVER THE WEST INDIES

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS,"
"FIRST STOP HONOLULU," "THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL," ETC.

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight

RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air

OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
Or Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness

FIRST STOP HONOLULU
Or Ted Scott Over the Pacific

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THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS

CHAPTER I

On the Wing

"You're getting to be a dandy flyer, Mr. Monet," declared Ted Scott, the famous aviator, as he and his companion stepped from the airplane that the latter had just brought to a stop. "Nobody could make a better landing than that."

"It's good of you to say so," replied Mr. Monet, a well set up, distinguished-looking man. "But if I have picked up some of the art, it's due to your instruction. Where could I find a better teacher than the great Ted Scott, the first man to cross the Atlantic in the air flight from New York to Paris?"

"Oh, there are plenty who could have done just as well," replied Ted modestly. "Take Tom Ralston for instance. That fellow's a bird. What he doesn't know about flying isn't worth knowing."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," replied Mr. Monet; "for if my present plans are carried out, Tom and I are going to take an overseas flight together."

"Overseas?" repeated Ted, in surprise. "You don't mean that you and Tom are going to Europe by air?"

"Well, hardly," returned Mr. Monet, with a smile. "My ambitions don't go as far as that. But we do propose to make a flight to the West Indies."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Ted. "That comes as a surprise. It's funny that Tom hasn't said anything to me about it. He's been as close-mouthed as a clam."

"That was because I put him under a pledge of silence," returned Mr. Monet. "That pledge still holds, as far as he is concerned. But I see no reason why I shouldn't take you into my confidence. I know you won't speak to any one else about it—except Mr. Hapworth, if you see him."

"No," promised Ted. "I give you my word of honor."

"I have two reasons for making the trip," explained Mr. Monet; "a family reason and a financial reason. An elder half-brother of mine went to an island of the West Indies years ago and took up sugar planting. I had news recently that my brother had died, leaving an

only child, Nina, a girl of about nineteen years of age. Her mother died some years ago, so that she is left alone with only her servants and the laborers on the plantation. The dying request of my brother was that I should take her as my ward, and of course I shall comply with it."

"I see," remarked Ted sympathetically.

"The next reason," went on Mr. Monet, with a whimsical smile, "may seem to you rather wild and fanciful. You mustn't laugh when I tell you that I propose to join the great army of hidden treasure hunters."

Ted Scott grinned despite himself.

"Some old pirate's treasure, eh?" he said. "I see it all. The lonely key in the West Indies. The buried doubloons, so many paces east from this tree, so many paces north from that rock. The skeleton of the pirate slain by his chief and left to keep guard over the treasure."

Mr. Monet laughed.

"I told you it might seem fanciful," he reminded Ted. "But this adventure has nothing to do with buried pirate gold, nor are there any ducats or pieces of eight in question. The wealth I have reference to lies in the sea."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" asked Ted. "A wrecked vessel with treasure in the hold?"

"Wrong again," laughed Mr. Monet. "The wealth is in the form of pearls."

Ted looked mystified.

"I'll explain more clearly," went on his companion. "It bears on a secret that has been for a long time in the possession of my brother's family. My brother, Pierre Monet, when at one time on a cruise in the West Indies, was wrecked on a little island. There are scores of them in the archipelago, you know, some large, some small. The one where he found himself stranded was little more than a coral spit, a mere dot in that waste of waters.

"He was the only survivor of the wreck and absolutely without provisions except what shellfish he could gather along the shore and cocoanuts that he gathered from a few palm trees on the island.

"But one day he came to a cave that had an entrance from the water. At high tide the water completely covered the opening, but when the tide was out the entrance was partly revealed.

"On one such occasion he swam into the cave. There in the water as it grew shallower was a bed of oysters, among the largest he had ever seen. He cracked some of them open for food and was amazed to find that almost every other one had in it a lustrous pearl.

"He was no expert, but was convinced that they were of great value. He had gathered several of them when, from the recesses of the

cave, a horrible shape with waving tentacles came gliding toward him. He dived frantically into the water and made for the beach with the thing after him. Fear lent him speed and he reached the beach in safety.

"From that time on his story was somewhat confused. He thinks he must have had a touch of sunstroke. In his dazed condition he probably knocked some boards together to form a raft and put out on the waters. Probably the thought of that horrible creature he had seen urged him on. At any rate, several days later he was picked up, nearly dead from hunger and thirst, by a small lugger manned by negroes who took him to a coast town where some one happened to recognize him and sent him home to his plantation. There he remained delirious for weeks but finally recovered."

"Delirious," murmured Ted.

"I see what you are thinking," returned Mr. Monet. "You think that the whole story might have been the dreams or imaginings that came to him in his delirium. It would be reasonable enough to think so. But we have satisfactory evidence that there was some reality behind the tale."

"What is that?" queried Ted.

"A magnificent pearl that was found in one of his pockets when he was brought home," replied Mr. Monet. "He must have thrust it

there hastily when panic seized him and he fled from the horrible guardian of the cave. That pearl has been examined by jewelers—who of course knew nothing of the circumstances of its finding—and they have declared it to be of great value."

For the first time Ted's incredulity struck a snag, and there was the keenest interest in his question when he asked:

"What did your brother do about it when he got well? Didn't he get a vessel and go to hunt for the island?"

"A natural question," was the reply. "No, he didn't. His health and nerves had been shattered by his terrible experience and he was never the same man afterwards. I suppose he always cherished vaguely the idea that at some time he would search for it, but the cares of his plantation were heavy and he never got around to it. Then, too, I suspect the terror of that fearful creature he had seen had left its impress on his weakened nerves. Moreover, he had not the slightest idea where the place lay. He had been floating for days, you know, before he was rescued. Then when they did find him he was raving. He might have searched for days or weeks or months amid that myriad of tiny islands without finding it."

"But won't you have the same difficulty?" asked Ted, in some bewilderment. "Seems to

me it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. How could you ever hit on it?"

"If I depended upon a vessel, it might take an enormous amount of time," admitted Mr. Monet. "That's one reason I'm going by airplane. With that I can cover more territory in a day than I could in a week by vessel."

"But all islands would look pretty much alike from the air," objected Ted. "You couldn't get down very close without danger from the trees. How can you identify it from the air?"

"By the very trees you've just mentioned," replied Mr. Monet. "There is one thing about the island that my brother remembered very clearly. There are not very many palm trees there, but what there are run in two lines, each line crossing the other at right angles so that they form a huge cross. He had never seen anything like that before, and it impressed him because of its singularity. In speaking of the place he always referred to it as the Island of the Cross of Palms."

"I see," remarked Ted thoughtfully. "Then, what you'll be looking for from the plane will be two lines of palms in the form of a cross."

"Exactly," replied Mr. Monet. "It isn't likely that more than one island in the group will be marked by such a singular formation."

"No," agreed Ted, "it ought to afford a pretty good clue on a sunshiny day. Of course,

if there were haze or clouds you might pass over it a dozen times without seeing it. But if the trees are still there, the chances are that you'll find the island."

"What do you mean, if the trees are still there?" asked his companion, in a puzzled tone.

"I was just thinking of the frequent hurricanes that pass over those places, often leveling the trees to the ground," replied Ted. "Of course, the chances are they're still there. But suppose they're not. Haven't you any other clue, a map of the island, its shape or something of that kind?"

"I have something," replied Mr. Monet, bringing a faded slip of paper from his pocket. "It's a sketch of the island from memory that my brother drew after he reached home. But there's nothing definite about it and I suppose there may be twenty islands of about the same shape."

Ted looked at the paper curiously. The plan of the island was roughly triangular in shape. There was an arrow pointing to a certain part of the beach, and accompanying it were the words:

"Look at it through the sun."

"What do those words mean?" asked Ted.

"I hardly know myself," confessed Mr. Monet. "The arrow is evidently pointing toward that part of the beach where the cave

lies. But the reference to the sun puzzles me. Still, when we're actually on the ground something there may suggest the meaning."

The roar of a plane was heard above them, and, looking up, they saw a large biplane, strikingly blue in color, hovering above them, evidently preparing for a landing.

"Why, that's the *Blue Gull,* the plane in which we're going to make the trip!" exclaimed Mr. Monet. "Tom went East last week to get it from the factory. He's got back sooner than I expected. What do you think of her?"

"Looks like a beauty from here," replied Ted. "The *Blue Gull!* Appropriate name for a plane that's going where there are gulls in thousands."

The plane came down in a graceful spiral, landed a little way from where the pair were, and came to a stop after a run of a few hundred feet.

Ted Scott and Mr. Monet were beside it as Tom Ralston, a bronzed, muscular young fellow, with an honest, good-natured face, climbed out of the machine to receive the warmest of welcomes.

Tom and Ted were old friends. They had met when both were in the service of the Red Cross in the work of rescue during a great Mississippi flood.

On one occasion when Tom and another

aviator were high up in the clouds their machine had caught fire. Their parachutes had been burned in places, so that the men dared not jump, and their doom seemed sealed.

Ted Scott had seen their danger and, without thought of his own peril, leaped into his own plane, mounted into the skies, reached the burning plane, and set about the work of rescue. From that time on Tom would have laid down his life for Ted Scott.

They had met again when both were in the service of the Rocky Mountain division of the Air Mail. There Tom had partly repaid the debt he owed his friend by giving him information that had helped Ted to clear the name of his dead father, who had been accused of murder.

"Well, here I am, and here's the *Blue Gull,*" stated Tom, when the first greetings were over. "What do you think of her? Isn't she a peach?"

Ted Scott and Mr. Monet looked the plane over with the greatest care and interest, the latter because he was going to entrust his life to her, the former with the keen vision of the accomplished aviator, and the more they looked the more they agreed that Tom's enthusiasm was warranted.

The plane included practically all of the advanced principles and improvements that had

been found valuable through a long series of tests.

It was provided with the light-weight, welded steel, seamless tubing fuselage that resists flying and landing strain. The absence of wood and wire eliminated the liability of stretching, warping, or twisting. Each joint and brace was welded with extreme care. The engine mount and the fire wall were of steel.

"Here's an interesting feature," remarked Tom, as he pointed to the adjustable horizontal stabilizer. "I can just move the control lever forward or backward to make adjustment for varying weight or loads, and I can do it during flight. The lever is placed out of the way so as to avoid the possibility of fouling on parachute harness or safety belt."

The split axle type undercarriage was shock absorbing and checked the rebound which in turn removed the possibility of "nosing over" on rutty ground. It made landing easy in heavy grass growth or on uneven ground.

The wheels were streamlined with aluminum discs. The wide tread cut down side sway when taxiing and aided in wing tip protection.

The flying wires had welded-in fittings which made it impossible for any flying or landing strain or stress to tear the fittings loose.

"And look at the cockpit!" exclaimed Tom. "See those roomy leather-cushioned seats!

No cramping of arms and legs there. Plenty of visibility. No forward struts to interfere with it. See those full-width windshields that entirely block the rush of the slipstream. And look at how this rudder bar is balanced. I tell you she's a dandy."

"She's all that," agreed Ted. "How has she worked on the way here?"

"Like a dream," responded Tom. "Of course, she had the stiffness that all new machines have at the start, but by now she's pretty well limbered up. And as for speed! Oh, boy, she can reel off a hundred an hour and think nothing of it. Of course your *Silver Streak* can beat her, but I don't know of any other plane that can."

"I'll have to go up in her with you some time," observed Ted.

"Come right along now and take a spin," urged Tom, who was as delighted with the plane as a child with a new toy.

"Like to, but can't," replied Ted regretfully. "Have an engagement that I can't break. But some time soon I'll try her out, if you say so."

"I've been telling Ted, Tom, about the flight we're going to take together," interposed Mr. Monet. "Of course, we're going to keep it a secret from everybody else except perhaps from Mr. Hapworth. But Ted is like one of ourselves, and he'll keep it quiet."

"Oh, Ted Scott's as safe as a church," replied Tom. "Well, now that you know about it, Ted, what do you think of it?"

"So much that I'd like nothing better than to go along," replied Ted.

"Why can't you?" asked Mr. Monet eagerly.

"Thank you," answered Ted; "but I couldn't just now. A couple of the aviators at our Air Mail headquarters are sick and the service is shorthanded. My leave of absence is almost up now, and they've been bombarding me with telegrams to cut it short, if possible, and get back there as soon as I can. But, gee, it's a temptation! There's something in it that stirs the blood. Mystery! Romance! The Cross of Palms! The Cave of Pearls!"

"And one thing more that you've forgotten," Mr. Monet reminded him, with a smile.

"What's that?" queried Ted.

"The fearful monster that guards the entrance to the cave," was the reply.

CHAPTER II

The Midnight Robbery

"Oh," laughed Ted Scott, in answer to Mr. Monet's last remark. "You mean the devil-fish?"

"Yes," replied his companion, and a look of gravity replaced his smile.

"You might have to reckon with that," agreed Ted thoughtfully. "Though of course the creature may be dead by this time."

"True," was the response. "Yet those monsters sometimes live to an incredible age. And even if it is dead, it may have left its progeny behind it."

"We'll have to take our chances on that," put in Tom Ralston. "We'll be well armed, and I guess there's nothing that a bullet can't stop."

"Well, there's no use losing sleep over it," remarked Ted. "The main thing is to find the island. Everything else can be attended to when you come to it. Just when do you expect to start?"

"In about three days," replied Mr. Monet. "By that time we expect to have all our supplies and equipment, and we're anxious to get off while this good weather holds."

"I'll see you again, then, before you go," said Ted, as he prepared to leave. "Meanwhile, I wish you the best of luck."

Ted mused over the project as he made his way back home. It was something to stir the blood of any one inclined to adventure, and adventure to Ted Scott was the very breath of life.

He worked late that night on a new idea that had occurred to him in connection with airplane construction, and it was after ten o'clock when he realized with a start that he had an errand to attend to at a jeweler's downtown.

The next day was the birthday of Charity Browning, dear old Charity, his foster mother, who with her husband, Eben, proprietor of the Bromville House, had taken care of Ted since he had come to them an orphan waif when he was ten years old. They had been all to him that his own parents could have been, and he loved them dearly.

He had fixed on a diamond pin as a present, and he hurried downtown to get it before the store closed.

The proprietor was a warm friend and admirer of Ted's, and they got into a conversa-

tion on matters of mutual interest, so that it was nearly midnight when Ted left to go back to the Bromville House.

He was surprised as he neared it to find that it was in total darkness. Even at this late hour this was unusual. The light on the porch that commonly burned all night was extinguished.

At first Ted thought that something had happened at the town's electric light plant. But second thought told him that the street arcs were still bright and he could see lights in the windows of other houses.

As he broke into a run he was conscious of two shadowy figures melting into the darkness at the side of the hotel.

He sprang up to the porch three steps at a time, his heart beating with a premonition of disaster.

"Father!" he cried. "Father! Mother!"

No answer came from the interior that was as dark and silent as the grave.

Ted rushed into the office to press the button that turned on the electric light.

As he did so he stumbled and nearly fell over the body of a man lying prostrate near the doorway.

With real terror now in his heart, he pressed the button and the room was irradiated with light.

There on the floor, with blood dabbling his

gray hair, lay Eben Browning, Ted's foster father!

Horror-stricken Ted fell on his knees beside the body.

While he is feeling for the heart to see if life still remained in the prostrate frame, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell just who Ted Scott was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted had no memory of his real father and mother. Until very recently he did not even know whether or not he was entitled to the name he bore. As far as his conscious life was concerned, it began when he found himself a child in the care of James and Miranda Wilson, worthy people of limited means residing in the town of Bromville, in the Middle West.

They had no children of their own and their hearts were filled with affection for the little waif. They treated him kindly and sent him to school. But they died when Ted was about ten years old within a few months of each other, and he was again at the mercy of the world.

But fate made amends to him when Eben and Charity Browning, themselves childless, adopted him. They thought the world of him and blessed the day he had come to them. He,

on his part, was devotedly attached to both of them.

Eben, kindly, upright and with a rare capacity for making friends, had for many years run the Bromville House, a hotel that in its day had been the leading one in the town.

Progress, however, has its tragedies, as Eben Browning found when the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation, makers of airplanes, established a mammoth plant in Bromville. It brought a small army of workmen and executives, and the town sprang into rapid growth, far exceeding its hotel facilities at the time. New and splendid hotels were erected with up-to-date equipment, and against them the shabby old Bromville House, that had made comfort rather than elegance its keynote, found itself outclassed, while its patronage steadily dwindled.

The chief blow was struck when the Hotel Excelsior was erected, vastly superior in size, beauty and facilities to anything that Bromville had ever known. With its spacious grounds, great verandas, and handsomely furnished interior, it was worthy to rank with many hotels found in great cities. As an additional attraction, a good golf course attached to it drew experts from all parts of the country to compete in matches and tournaments and by just so much increased the prosperity of the hotel.

Some of the old clientele still clung to the Bromville House, as well as travelers of limited means who could afford nothing better. But the knell of Eben's prosperity had sounded.

Hardest of all to bear was the fact that all the property on which the Hotel Excelsior stood and on which the golf course was laid out had once belonged to Eben Browning and that he had been swindled out of it by the man who built the hotel, Brewster Gale.

By devices that Eben never clearly understood and yet were familiar to swindlers and unscrupulous lawyers—reorganizations, forced sales, holding companies and other tricks—Gale had apparently achieved a clear title to the property. Bewildered, dazed, with no money to fight Gale and his legal batteries in a long-drawn-out struggle in the courts, the old man had been forced to do without his money while Gale rode on the crest of prosperity.

Ted Scott, as he grew up, did all he could to maintain the steadily sinking fortunes of the Brownings. Then, when the Aero Plant came to the town, he applied for work there and got it. Ted was quick, industrious and intelligent, and was rapidly advanced until he was earning fair wages, the greater part of which he turned over to his foster parents.

His work was congenial to him, for he had

always been ardently interested in airplanes, but he secretly cherished the hope of himself becoming a flyer some day.

But that day seemed distressingly distant, for first he would have to go to a flying school, which would require an expenditure of several hundred dollars, and with so much of his money needed at home he seldom had a cent for anything outside of his actual needs.

At this juncture two things in quick succession gave Ted the opportunity he had been longing for. One was when he pulled out of the way of a rushing airplane Paul Monet, a middle-aged French gentleman of wealth, at that time staying at the Hotel Excelsior, thereby winning the Frenchman's undying gratitude.

The other fortunate thing for Ted was the visit one morning to the aero plant of Walter Hapworth, a young millionaire and golf expert who had been competing in one of the tournaments on the Excelsior's course. Ted was assigned to show the young man around, and the lad's thorough knowledge of airplanes and the readiness and accuracy with which he responded to every question aroused Hapworth's interest. He took a strong liking to the boy and in conversation learned of the latter's ambition to fly.

Hapworth determined that Ted Scott should

have his chance, and in connection with Mr. Monet offered the boy enough money to defray his expenses at the flying school, as well as enough to make up for the wages he would lose while learning. Ted accepted as a loan only what they desired to make a gift.

At the flying school Ted Scott attracted instant attention by his aptitude, skill and daring. He proved abundantly that he had the stuff of which real aviators were made. By the time he had completed his course it was recognized that he would go far in his chosen profession.

Ted secured a position in the Air Mail Service between St. Louis and Chicago, and before long was recognized as a top-notcher.

About that time the country was greatly stirred up by a coming contest to see who should be the first to cross from New York to Paris in a non-stop flight by airplane. Some of the most renowned aviators in the country were planning to compete. The prize was twenty-five thousand dollars in cash, offered by a resident of New York.

Ted yearned to enter the contest; but as he had no plane and no resources of any account, it seemed impossible. Walter Hapworth, however, learned of his ambition and offered to finance the trip. Ted accepted and went to San Francisco to superintend the building of the

plane, which he named the *Hapworth,* in honor of his backer.

How the country smiled with amusement at the audacity of this young unknown in daring to enter the contest against veterans of international reputation—how their amusement became amazement when he hopped off from San Francisco and reached New York in two jumps, beating all the world's records—how the amazement became delirium when he mounted into the skies one misty morning and turned the nose of his plane toward Paris—how he flew, a lone eagle with undaunted heart, across the surging billows of the wild Atlantic—how, after fighting with storm and fog, he swooped down on Paris, winning the prize and finding himself the idol of the world—all is told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris; or, Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight."

Shortly after Ted's return, a great Mississippi flood brought disaster to a large part of the South and aroused the sympathy of the whole nation. Ted enlisted in the aviation section of the Red Cross and performed prodigies of service in rescuing the imperiled people, having many thrilling escapes from death in the course of his work.

Later Ted resumed his service with the Air Mail in a particularly dangerous section of the

Rocky Mountains. Here he gained the friendship of Frank Bruin, the son of a lumberman, whose life he saved at great risk to himself.

A non-stop flight over the Pacific from San Francisco to Honolulu offered Ted an opportunity for a new adventure. How he and Mr. Hapworth entered the contest in their plane, the *Silver Streak*—how they fought with wind and waves and waterspouts—how many times their lives hung by a single thread—how they finally reached their destination—these things are told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "First Stop Honolulu; or, Ted Scott Over the Pacific."

Now to return to Ted Scott as he bent in horror over the bleeding form of his foster father, not knowing whether the man was alive or dead.

To Ted's infinite relief, he found that Eben's heart was beating.

Ted lifted the helpless form in his muscular arms and bore it to a sofa in the anteroom adjoining the office. There he busied himself with bathing Eben's head, chafing his wrists, and trying to restore him to consciousness.

In the meantime he had called for help, and a maid, Mary, and Josh Hopkins, a man of all work about the hotel, came running down the stairs.

Exclamations of horror broke from their lips

as they saw the motionless form and bleeding head of Eben.

"Go call your mistress, Mary," commanded Ted. "And you, Josh, 'phone to Doctor Meredith. Tell him to come at once."

Josh went to the 'phone and Mary darted up the stairs. She had barely reached the landing when she uttered a piercing cry.

"Oh, she's hurt! She's dead!" the girl wailed. "Lying here on the landing! Oh, Mr. Ted, come here!"

Ted dropped his ministrations to Eben and rushed up the stairs. There lay Charity, limp and silent, while Mary, with hysterical sobs, was trying to lift her.

Ted picked Charity up and carried her into her room, where he laid her on the bed. Charity's eyes opened as he did so, and she put her hands to her head and moaned.

No blood was in evidence, and Ted leaped to the conclusion that she had been simply stunned by the blow that had felled her. He did what he could, aided by Mary, and then, leaving Charity in the girl's care, ran downstairs to look after Eben.

"Doctor says he'll be here right away," reported Josh, as he went on ministering to Eben.

Fortunately the doctor's house was only a few doors down the street and he had not retired when he received Josh's message. He

came hurrying in now and took charge of the wounded pair.

A hasty but skilful examination soon disclosed that no mortal injuries had been inflicted.

"A little nearer the temple, and Eben would have been killed," he pronounced. "As it is, he had a hard crack, but the skull isn't fractured. He'll come around soon."

As for Charity, the blow that felled her had been a glancing one and had inflicted no serious injury.

"It was probably fright as much as anything that made her lose consciousness," declared the doctor. "A few days to recover from the nervous shock, and she'll be all right. What scoundrels could have done this?"

"Robbers I suppose!" exclaimed Ted, his eyes blazing. "They hadn't an enemy in the world!"

He rushed over to the office safe.

The door stood open! The safe was empty!

CHAPTER III

A Growing Mystery

Papers, books and documents littered the floor, scattered in wildest confusion. Every corner of the safe had been explored.

Ted Scott knew that a considerable amount in money and checks should be in the safe. But there was not a bill, not a check, not a coin visible. The robbers had made a clean sweep.

Ted leaped to the 'phone and called up the police station and in a few minutes the chief, Dugan, and two of his men came hurrying into the office.

By this time the hotel guests and other servants had been aroused by the tumult, and a number of them in all stages of undress with bathrobes hurriedly thrown over them, filled the room.

Dugan sent them all out when he arrived, and he and his men made a rapid search of the office for clues. One thing they found, or rather two, that might later on prove of value.

These were two clubs, fashioned roughly out

of some kind of wood with which Ted was not familiar. He knew that they had not been in the place before, so the robbers must have brought the clubs with them.

On one of them was a stain of blood intermingled with gray hairs—Eben's hair. Ted clenched his fists in rage. The scoundrels! The cowards! Thus ruthlessly to assail an old man!

"This seems like amateur work," commented Dugan. "Professionals would not be likely to use this kind of weapon. A tap with a blackjack would be more to their liking. The clubs show one thing, however, and that is that it wasn't a one-man job. Two or more were engaged in it."

Into Ted's mind surged the memory of the two shadowy figures that had merged into the darkness as he had come up the walk.

"I thought I saw two figures just as I came to the hotel," he told Dugan. "But I didn't know of this foul deed then, or I would have pursued and might have caught them."

"Could you identify them if you saw them again?" asked the chief.

"No," replied Ted regretfully. "They were nothing but blots. I couldn't even tell whether they were tall or short, fat or thin."

"Too bad," observed Dugan. "Ten to one they were the fellows who did the job. Here,

McMullin," he said to one of his men. "Go down to the station and send every available man out to pick up any suspicious characters. Telephone to near-by towns and ask the police there to be on the watch and to stop any automobile riders that can't give a good account of themselves. Hustle now."

McMullin hastened away, and Dugan turned to Ted.

"How about the servants here? Are they all right?"

"Absolutely," declared Ted emphatically. "They're straight as a string, have been with us a long time and they think the world of Eben. No, dismiss them from consideration."

"And the guests?" asked the chief.

"All right, I think," returned Ted. "We know most of them, old customers. And of course they'd resent being questioned. It would hurt the business of the house."

By this time, Eben, under the skilful ministrations of the doctor, had recovered consciousness. He sat hunched up on the sofa, his head bandaged, his face pale, but fully cognizant of his surroundings.

Ted ran over to him and put his arm affectionately on the old man's shoulder.

"How are you feeling now, Dad?" he asked anxiously.

"None too good, my boy," answered Eben. "But Charity, where's Charity? Why isn't she here?"

"She's all right," Ted hastened to assure him. "The robbers struck her too, but she isn't much hurt."

"I must go to her!" cried Eben, making as though to get on his feet. But the doctor pushed him gently back.

"You must stay here for a while, Eben," he said kindly. "You can take my word for it that Charity isn't much injured. The nervous shock is the main thing. She'll be around in a day or two."

"Oh, if I could only get hold of those rascals!" groaned Eben.

"Who were they?" asked Ted eagerly. "Did you see them?"

"Nary a glimpse of them," replied the old man. "I had been out on the porch and had turned to go into the office when something struck me from behind. I could feel myself falling and that's the last I remember. Did they get anything?" he asked anxiously.

"They cleaned out the safe," replied Ted. "How much money did you have there?"

The old man groaned.

"A little over six hundred dollars," he answered. "About four hundred in cash and two hundred and twenty-five in checks. Oh, if I'd

only put the money in the bank to-day as I had a mind to!"

"Of course we can stop payment on the checks," Ted tried to comfort him. "But four hundred dollars is too much to lose."

"We don't know that you have lost it yet," put in Dugan. "Perhaps we can nab the thieves and get back most of it. But I'd like to know if Mrs. Browning recognized the robbers."

"I'll go up stairs and find out," volunteered the doctor. "I don't care to have any one else see her just now. She's in no shape to be subjected to much questioning."

He went upstairs and returned a few minutes later with the statement that Charity had not recognized her assailants. They had put out the lights after the assault on Eben, and when she came out on the landing the place was in darkness. She had been struck and knew no more.

There was little more to be done that night. Dugan departed with the promise that he would do everything in his power to apprehend the robbers. Eben was put to bed, and the doctor secured a nurse to look after the welfare of the old people.

Ted was too agitated to sleep and sat up for the rest of the night racking his brains for some way to get on the track of the scoundrels.

But in the absence of real clues to their identity, this seemed a hopeless task. He could only hope that the work of Dugan and his men might prove effective.

As soon as he could in the morning he went to the office of the local paper and put in a notice offering a thousand dollars' reward for any information that might lead to the arrest and conviction of the thieves. He sent a similar statement to papers in the near-by towns.

Whether any of the money was recovered he did not much care. He could amply afford to make good the loss of Eben as well as to pay the reward, and Eben's own fortune was now ample since Gale Brewster had been forced to make restitution. But Ted's hands ached to get hold of the rascals who had struck down the two who were dearest to him on earth. He longed to put them behind the bars. Still more, he longed that they might be brought within reach of his fists. But this seemed too much to hope for.

If he only had a real clue! But clues—except the shadowy clue of the two clubs—seemed non-existent. He had an expert come from a neighboring city to seek for fingerprints on the clubs and on the safe. But nothing developed, and the expert gave it as his opinion that the robbers had worn rubber gloves.

The robbery had caused great excitement in the town. Bromville was a law-abiding community and crimes of violence were infrequent. Indignation ran high in this particular case, for Eben and Charity were held in the highest esteem and affection. The cruelty and wantonness of the attack added to the popular wrath, and it would have gone hard with the scoundrels had they been apprehended.

No one was more horrified than Mr. Monet, whose friendship with Ted Scott had brought him into close relations with the old people, whom he regarded as the salt of the earth. His first act was to double the reward that Ted had offered.

"It is abominable, abominable!" he ejaculated, his face white with anger. "The cowards! The scoundrels! Thieves and murderers! For they are murderers at heart, and it is only the mercy of heaven that their victims are alive!"

"I'd like five minutes alone with them after they're caught!" exclaimed Ted. "Just five minutes. The law could do what it liked with them after that."

"How are the old people now?" asked Mr. Monet solicitously. "I should like to go and see them before I start on my trip."

"That's very kind of you," responded Ted. "But the doctor's orders are that they shall

see no one as yet. I'll give them your good wishes and I know they will appreciate them. Doctor Meredith says they will be all right within a week or so."

"I hope by the time I get back that you will have caught the scoundrels," said Mr. Monet.

"I hope so," rejoined Ted. "By the way, when will you be ready to start?"

"Day after to-morrow, if my plans go through," replied Mr. Monet.

"Still as enthusiastic as ever?" asked Ted, with a smile.

"More so, if possible," was the reply. "I've looked at the matter from every angle and I don't see why I shouldn't succeed. Of course, it isn't merely for the pearls I hope to find. As you know, I have all the money I need. But the romance of the thing has set something stirring in my blood that has made me feel twenty years younger."

"I know just how you feel!" ejaculated Ted. "Gee, but I'd like to be going along!"

They chatted for a few minutes longer and then Ted left his friend and made his way toward the flying field where lay the *Silver Streak* the gallant airplane with which he had made the record-breaking flight over the Pacific from San Francisco to Honolulu.

As he neared the field he saw a little way ahead of him two figures that he recognized

with a twinge of disgust, Greg and Duck Gale, the twin sons of Brewster Gale, proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior.

They were slightly older than Ted and for two years past had been members of a dissipated set among the young men of the town. By the better element, they were held in contempt. They had been engaged in a number of shady transactions that had aroused general indignation, and only the money of their father had saved them several times from going to jail. They were arrogant, blustering and supercilious and, like most of that type, were cowards at heart.

This was the first glimpse Ted Scott had had of the twins during his present visit to Bromville. They were nearly a block ahead of him when Ted first saw them. They reached a corner just as a shambling figure came down from a side street carrying a basket

The newcomer was a half-witted fellow named Billy Towson. He was a good-natured unfortunate, whom almost everybody liked and pitied. His mother was a widow, hard put to it to earn a living for several children, and Billy, her eldest, helped out a little by carrying packages and doing errands that came within the compass of his feeble wits.

As Billy passed Greg the latter knocked the basket out of his hand. Billy looked bewildered

and aggrieved, but stooped meekly enough to pick up the basket.

As he straightened up Duck knocked off his cap. Again poor Billy had to stoop and pick up his cap, and as he placed it on his head Greg once more kicked the basket out of his hand.

Tears came into Billy's eyes, while the twins laughed uproariously and clapped each other on the back. They were having a great time, so enjoyable in fact that they kept it up, first the basket and then the hat being on the ground, until Billy broke down and cried.

Ted had quickened his steps as he saw what was going on, and now he burst on the chuckling pair like a whirlwind.

He grasped Greg by the collar and yanked him backward with such force that the bully staggered and fell to the sidewalk. Then he turned to Duck and gave him a clip in the jaw that shook him from his head to his heels!

CHAPTER IV

Whirling Fists

"You unspeakable curs! You yellow dogs!" cried Ted Scott, his eyes blazing as he faced the astonished tormentors of poor Billy Towson. "What do you mean by picking on a poor half-witted fellow like this? Here, Billy," he went on, as he picked up the basket and handed it to him. "You run along now. I'll attend to these fellows."

Billy looked at Ted with dog-like adoration in his eyes, took the basket and shambled away.

"You'll pay for this, Ted Scott!" yelled Greg, frantic with rage, as he scrambled to his feet.

"You bet he will," echoed Duck, as he faced Ted menacingly. "You needn't think you can get away with anything like that."

"I've gotten away with it before," replied Ted coolly, as he held his fists ready for action. "Do you remember the last thrashing I gave you skunks? I'm ready to repeat it. Come right along and take your medicine."

Although each of them was older and quite as large as Ted and although there were two against one, they hesitated.

"Not such fun tackling me as it was tormenting Billy Towson, is it?" taunted Ted.

With a bellow of rage, Greg plunged into him while Duck attacked him from the other side.

Ted met Greg with a blow square between the eyes that made him stagger back. Then, whirling like a flash, Ted caught Duck on the point of the chin, getting a blow on the chest in return.

It was now that Ted's splendid physical condition stood him in good stead. The muscles of his opponents were flabby from dissipated living, and their blows, when they landed, lacked force. But they seldom landed, for Ted Scott was as quick as a wildcat and ducked and shifted, blocking most of their blows with his arms and shoulders, while his own fists landed with the force of a battering ram.

Through the medley of whirling arms Ted caught a glimpse out of the corner of his eye of several young fellows rushing toward them from the Aero Plant which was near at hand. But he was too busy to pay much attention to them and his arms kept flying like flails until he had both of his opponents battered and groggy.

"Two against one!" yelled a voice that Ted

recognized as belonging to a chum, Mark Lawson. "Here's where I take a hand."

"You keep out of this, Mark," panted Ted, as he caught Greg with a fearful crack that knocked him to the sidewalk. "This is my job and I'm going to finish it."

With Greg out of the running for the moment, Ted went into Duck like a whirlwind, lifting him off his feet and sending him to join his brother.

"Gee!" cried Jack Forrest, another friend, gleefully. "That was a peach of a clip!"

"Prettiest licking I ever saw," chuckled Breck Lewis.

"Send for the ambulance," cried Mark Lawson, and there was a roar of laughter, for they all detested Greg and Duck Gale.

Ted stood over his fallen foemen, his eyes gleaming with the light of battle.

"Get up, you curs, and take some more," he commanded. "I've got plenty more of the same kind in stock."

But the cowed bullies, shamed and bleeding, were in no hurry to accept the invitation. They had lifted themselves into a sitting position and thought it safer to stay there.

"Get a feather bed for them," called out Mark. "That sidewalk must be cold and hard."

"Gee, but they're of a retiring disposition," chuckled Jack Forrest.

"Sitting pretty," sang out Breck Lewis and again the crowd broke into laughter.

"Got enough?" asked Ted of his discomfited foemen.

"What's the use?" muttered Greg huskily. "You've got your gang with you now."

"You'll keep hands off, won't you, fellows?" was Ted's appeal to his friends.

There was a general chorus of assent.

"Sure thing," Mark voiced the sentiments of all. "Wouldn't break up this show for anything."

"You hear what they say," remarked Ted. "Have I got to pull you to your feet so that I can knock you down again? Or have you had enough?"

The disgruntled twins made no answer, but their eyes were full of hate.

"Speak quickly," commanded Ted, "or I'll do as I said."

"Enough," growled Greg.

"Enough," echoed Duck.

"I thought so," observed Ted. "Get up, then, and get away from here. And the next time you pick out a half-witted boy to torment make sure that there's no one around."

Ted went with his friends to the flying field, and as it was the noon hour they had plenty of time for a confabulation as he carefully examined the *Silver Streak*.

"Where are you going with her this time, Ted?" asked Mark. "Any other flights for prizes in prospect? You've conquered the Atlantic. You've conquered the Pacific. What next?"

"The South Pole, I suppose," remarked Breck Lewis. "That's about all there is left to conquer."

"Nothing like that," replied Ted, with a smile. "At least, not yet. The *Silver Streak* is going to carry me back to Denver, and there I'll start plugging again in the Air Mail Service."

"Wonder where the *Blue Gull's* going," observed Jack Forrest, as he pointed to the new plane about which Tom Ralston was working. "Seems to be a kind of mystery about that. I've asked Tom and he seems to be tongue-tied or something. Won't open up."

"I suppose there's a reason," replied Ted. "One thing I'm sure of, and that is wherever it's going it's bound to get there. They don't make any better pilots than Tom Ralston."

At this moment Tom caught sight of Ted and came over to him. They shook hands warmly.

"You ought to hear what Ted's just been saying about you, Tom," laughed Mark. "Said that they didn't make any better pilots than you are."

"Ted's blinded by friendship," replied Tom lightly. "I know enough to push in the stick when I want to go down and pull it back when I want to go up. But it takes more than that to make a good pilot. Listen to this," and he drew a slip of newspaper from his pocket.

"I read it in this morning's paper," he explained. "It seems that some fellows down at an army flying school couldn't make the grade and were dropped. They wanted to know the reason, and this is what they got. Here's the definition of the flying instinct that they didn't have."

He read from the extract:

" 'The innate faculty of selective and instinctive discrimination of the stimuli of the sensorimotor apparatus to harmoniously adjust metabolic changes in physiological and psychological equilibrium in such manner as to comprehend and assimilate instruction in the attributes is necessary to perform the intricate and complex operations which comprise the piloting of aircrafts.' "

"Help!" cried Ted, putting his hand dizzily to his forehead. "Have I had that disease all this time and never knew it?"

"I guess you have," laughed Tom, as he

folded up the scrap of paper. "It just goes to show what good men we flying chaps are."

"You must be good if you've got all that," chuckled Mark. "And now that you've got that out of your system, I'm going to ask you once more where you're going in the *Blue Gull.*"

"Up in the air," and Tom chuckled gently.

"So I suspected," replied Mark sarcastically. "But where are you going to come down?"

"Either on land or water," was the answer.

"No use, Mark," put in Jack Forrest. "That old clam won't open up!"

Tom laughed.

"Owner's orders, boys," he said. "I'm just a lowly pilot and the boss has put on the clamps. When we get back—if we do—I'll tell you all about it. One thing certain is that we're going to travel fast. I let out the old bus yesterday and made a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour."

"Gee, that was going some!" exclaimed Breck Lewis.

"Oh, that was just crawling along," put in Mark, in good-natured raillery of Tom. "Did you read of that Italian that broke the world's record for speed a little while ago, hanging up a mark of two hundred and ninety-six—practically three hundred—miles an hour? That was real traveling."

"Even at that," observed Jack Forrest, "he was using only nine hundred and fifty of his eleven hundred horsepower. If he had let his machine out to the limit, he would have gone well over three hundred."

"That's all right," objected Tom Ralston. "But the machine that made that record was built for that special purpose, and it couldn't keep up the gait for long. My old bus will do over a hundred an hour, day in and day out, and carry a couple of passengers and tons of supplies while she's doing it."

"Talking of planes," said Mark, "we're building one now in the plant that's said to be fool-proof. It's light and handy and can be built at a cost of only a little over a thousand dollars."

"Is that so?" asked Ted with interest, remembering the fifteen thousand dollars that had gone into the building of the *Silver Streak*. "Tell me about it."

"It's this way," explained Mark. "As I said, it's remarkably light. The control surfaces are enlarged and the upper wing is placed ahead of the lower wing. This gives easy control, even in a stall, and it can be brought down at a forward air speed of between fifteen and eighteen miles an hour."

"That means a lot," commented Ted, "when you remember how easy it is for a new pilot to

stall and go into a spin when he makes an error of judgment."

"Doesn't it?" agreed Mark. "If the plane proves to be all that is claimed for it, half the terror of flying will be taken from the new pilot and it will be a safe and low-priced plane for those who wish to fly occasionally for pleasure."

"Oh, we've just scratched the surface of aviation," remarked Ted Scott enthusiastically. "I can see the time coming when airplanes will be as common and numerous as automobiles are now. The head of a family," he continued more lightly, "will just go out to the garage on a Sunday afternoon, tune up his machine, bundle the wife and kids into it and set out for a half-day's enjoyment. He'll fly over two or three states, land in some pleasant field for a picnic supper, come back at dark, put the machine into the garage, go into the house, wind up the clock, put out the cat, and climb into bed. Just as easy as that!"

"Not quite," objected Tom Ralston thoughtfully. "How about the garage, as you call it? It'll have to be pretty big to hold an airplane. And how about a landing field to start from and come down on? All right for people in the country where there's plenty of ground. But how about the cliff dwellers in city apartment houses?"

"Easy," argued Ted. "There'll be folding wings that will enable the plane to take up no more room in the garage than a car. And the helicopter principle will be perfected so that the plane can rise straight into the air and come down just as straight. Landing fields will be unimportant. I tell you, fellows, we're just at the beginning of flying. It's like radio, there's no limit to the possibilities.

"Why, the time will come," he went on, his enthusiasm kindling, "when the skies will be fairly black with machines, the same as the roads now are full of automobiles on Sunday or a holiday. It will be thought a disgrace, or at least a sign of poverty, not to own an airplane. And there will be enough fool-proof devices invented to make it as safe to drive an airplane as it is now to drive a car. And mind, I'm not talking of a hundred years from now. I'll give ten years, twenty years at most, before this becomes a reality."

"Well, maybe you're right," assented Tom Ralston. "But, to change the subject, where did you get that lump on your cheekbone, Ted?"

"Oh, that," replied Ted laughingly, caressing the spot in question, "is the result of a love tap I got in a little mix-up a while ago."

"Haven't you heard, Tom?" queried Mark. "You missed the time of your life in not see-

ing that scrap. Two of them at once, and Ted polished them off most beautifully."

"Been fighting?" asked Tom, with quickened interest. "Who were the fellows that felt the weight of your fists?"

"Greg and Duck Gale," replied Jack Forrest, before Ted could answer. "And what Ted did to them was a sin and a shame. Gee, but they looked as though they'd been drawn through a sausage machine!"

"Sorry I missed it," replied Tom. "Greg and Duck Gale! Funny, but I was talking with those fellows no later than yesterday."

"Is that so?" asked Ted, with interest. "I didn't know that they were interested in airplanes—interested, in fact, in anything but drink and cards."

"I guess that's their long suit," answered Tom. "But they sure talked me to a standstill. Had all I could do to get rid of them."

"What about?" asked Ted.

"A trip to South America," replied Tom.

Ted sat up straight with a jerk.

"To South America!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER V

In the Grip of the Storm

Tom Ralston looked at Ted Scott curiously in response to the latter's startled exclamation.

"Why, yes," he answered. "What is there so remarkable about that?"

"Nothing especial, I suppose," returned Ted. "Only it kind of knocked me off my feet for the moment. I didn't think those fellows had enterprise enough to undertake an airplane trip."

"I don't think they were counting upon making a trip for pleasure," answered Tom thoughtfully. "Seemed to be a case of must. Looked as though they wanted to get away in a hurry for some reason or other. They were mighty flustered at the time. I thought it might be a case of a quick get-away because they had got into a scrape of some kind or other and thought it was a good time to light out. Else they were planning something crooked and were taking time by the forelock."

"What did you tell them?" asked Ted.

"Told them they were barking up the wrong tree," answered Tom. "You see, they seemed to think I was on my own and open to an engagement. But I told them that I was already under contract for another expedition, and that settled it. They went away as though they were mightily disappointed."

"I see," said Ted slowly. "Up to some mischief, probably. I wouldn't put anything past them. But I'm glad you weren't able to take them. You'd have found yourself mixed up in a nasty mess of some kind or other."

"That's what I figured," replied Tom. "I didn't like the cut of their jibs and I wouldn't have taken them, even if I'd happened to be free. I was pretty short and crusty with them and they saw that I didn't like to be with them, even if they were dressed up as swells."

"I didn't know there was anything swell about them," put in Mark. "Seems to me they've been looking rather seedy. I rather thought that their father had been shutting down on them. Shouldn't wonder, for the Mr. Gale has had to keep digging deep into his pockets to keep them out of trouble lately. I hear they've been up to their necks in debt, poker losses and everything."

"I don't know anything about that," replied Tom. "All I know is that they were dressed up to the nines. Looked as though they'd just

stepped out of a fashion plate. They must have persuaded their father to loosen up. Either that, or they've got some confiding tailor to trust them."

"I noticed that to-day," remarked Ted. "They were fashionables of the first water. Too bad I had to muss up their pretty suits," he added, with a grin.

"It sure was," laughed Mark. "They'll have to have them sponged and pressed. They were a wreck when you got through with them, Ted."

The whistle blew just then, and Mark Lawson, Jack Forrest, and Breck Lewis had to leave their friends and return to the works. Ted, after a little more conversation with Tom, made his way home for dinner.

Eben Browning, whose sturdy constitution had enabled him to rally quickly from his encounter with the robbers, looked at Ted quizzically.

"Had a fall or anything?" he asked, as he noted the swelling on Ted's cheekbone.

"No," laughed Ted. "Somebody else did the falling. Have just been having a little run-in with those dear friends of ours, Greg and Duck Gale."

Eben's brow darkened.

"Those fellows are a disgrace to the town," he ejaculated wrathfully. "If they got the lick-

ings they deserved, they'd get one every day. What have they been up to now?"

"Picking on poor Billy Towson," replied Ted, and briefly narrated the events that had led up to the fight.

"I hope you gave them good and plenty!" exclaimed Eben.

"They seemed to think it was plenty," laughed Ted. "They weren't asking for any more. But how about yourself, Dad? How are you feeling?"

"Getting better by the minute," replied Eben cheerily. "I'm a pretty tough old knot and it takes a lot to knock me out. Heard anything yet from the ads?"

"Not a thing," replied Ted regretfully. "The reward is big enough to bring in something if they were members of a gang. Usually, one of such a crowd is willing to peach, if there is enough money in it. Probably the two fellows—if there were two—were doing the job by themselves, and you can be sure they'll keep mighty quiet."

"I guess I can kiss my four hundred dollars good-by," murmured Eben mournfully.

"I'm afraid so," agreed Ted. "The thieves have probably made good their escape. But don't worry about that, Dad. Besides my pay, there's the royalties from my book that are coming in fine. I'll make it up to you. But it

certainly galls me to think of those scoundrels snickering as they think about the way they put it over. I only wish they had been to-day in the place of Greg and Duck Gale. They'd have been nursing some bruises this afternoon."

"You're a good son to Charity and me, Ted. Better than many a man's own son. But I guess you needn't use your money for me any more. I don't like to lose four hundred dollars, but since Brewster Gale made restitution it isn't the tragedy it might have been once."

Charity had completely recovered from the shock she had suffered and was about the hotel as usual, and Ted's gratitude was so great at having them with him, when both the old people might so easily have been killed, that the mere matter of the lost money did not trouble him at all.

Another day passed without any news of the robbers, and it began to seem probable that they would never be apprehended. On the next afternoon Ted dismissed them from his mind for a time, while he went out to the flying field to bid good-by to Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston before they set out on their adventurous flight.

He found that everything was in readiness for their departure. The *Blue Gull* had been tuned up thoroughly down to every strut and wire. Her fuel tanks were loaded and there was an abundance of supplies of every kind.

Her engine was working sweetly and everything seemed to be propitious for a prosperous venture.

Ted Scott received the warmest kind of a greeting from his two friends, who already had donned their flying suits and helmets.

"All ready for the start, I see," said Ted, as he shook hands.

"Yes," replied Mr. Monet. "I've just received a report from the Weather Bureau at Washington that predicts clear weather over the Caribbean for several days to come."

"No hurricanes or tornadoes in sight then," remarked Ted.

"Not yet, at any rate," responded Mr. Monet. "But of course those things come up in a twinkling, and we may find ourselves right in the heart of one after we get above the sea, though it is not the usual season for them. But we've got to take our chance on that."

"I suppose there'll be a glut in the pearl market after you get back," went on Ted, with a grin.

The Frenchman laughed.

"I don't know about that," he responded. "Either that, or we may have furnished a meal for the devilfish that guards the entrance to the cave."

Ted's laughing face grew grave.

"There's many a true word spoken in jest,"

he responded. "I hope you're well supplied with firearms."

For answer Paul Monet pointed to two rifles of the newest make stowed away in the fuselage.

"There are some pretty strong arguments," and he smiled, "that may make even a devil-fish listen to reason."

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Ted. "You want to remember, too, that there are some pretty rough human characters in the islands that you may come in contact with. It's just as well to keep an eye out for them."

"You mean the natives?" asked his companion.

"Not especially," replied Ted. "Of course, in the interior of some of the larger islands there isn't a very clear distinction between mine and thine and there are outlaws and bandits to be reckoned with. But what I especially had in mind were the rum-runners and hijackers that get their contraband liquor in the West Indies and smuggle it into the United States. Lots of those fellows would cut your throat as indifferently as they'd light a match. They're thoroughly bad, and if they should get wind of what you're after, they'd do anything to get the pearls."

"I guess you're right," replied Mr. Monet more gravely. "Thanks for the warning.

We'll try to steer clear of those gentry. As to knowing what we're after, there are only three people in the world who know our secret, you, Tom and myself. I haven't even told my niece, Nina, what I have in mind."

"Fine," declared Ted. "She might let it out unguardedly. By the way, do you propose to bring her back with you?"

"Yes, if she isn't afraid to travel in an airplane," was the response. "If that proves to be the case, I will arrange for her steamship passage to this place. In that event, I expect to be back here in time to receive her. And now, Ted, do me a favor and take one last look over this machine. Tom and I can see nothing wrong with it, but I'll feel better if we have your opinion too."

Ted did as requested and found everything as far as he could see in perfect shape.

"Tunes up to the minute," he pronounced, when he had finished his inspection. "I would not hesitate at this minute to attempt to fly over to Europe with her instead of merely to the West Indies."

"Good!" said Mr. Monet, with great satisfaction. "That removes the last apprehension from my mind. Anything that's good enough for Ted Scott is good enough for me."

The last minute preparations were completed, and Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston shook

hands fervently with Ted and climbed into the machine. A mechanic knocked away the blocks and the *Blue Gull* roared down the runway for a few hundred yards and then soared like a bird into the skies.

Tom turned her nose southward and the momentous journey was begun, while Ted Scott was sore at heart as he looked after her until she was a mere dot in the skies and vanished from sight.

Ted's leave of absence was drawing to a close. He would have left for Denver before this, had it not been for the robbery. But now Eben and Charity were well enough for him to leave without any compunction of conscience, and he knew that his employers sorely needed him in the Air Mail Service.

He spent two days more in Bromville, gathering up the loose ends of his affairs, and then set out on his return trip to Denver.

It was not an ideal day for starting on his journey, for the sky was dark and lowering and great banks of clouds on the horizon betokened a coming storm. But Ted Scott seldom let himself be deterred by the weather. Day in and day out, night in and night out, through wind and rain and sleet and snow, he had pursued his appointed work until his name had become a synonym for daring.

As he sped along at a rate of a hundred miles

an hour his thoughts were busy with many things.

The events of his life—a crowded life for one so young—passed before him as in a panorama. From the depths of obscurity, a mere lad toiling at moderate wages, he had been lifted in a few months to fame and fortune. He had dined with kings, he had been applauded by millions, his name had become a household word on the tongues of the world. As modest as he was brave, he wondered at how it had happened. It seemed to him at times as though it must be all a dream. He saw himself challenging the wrath of the Atlantic and later on the broad reaches of the Pacific, he heard the explosion of his engine and the whiz of the cylinder heads through the plane when he had made the world's record for altitude and found himself in a crippled plane nine miles above the earth. He had dared greatly and come through unscathed.

But none of these spectacular events appealed to him so much or brought him as great happiness as the consciousness that he had cleared his father's memory. To that task he had set himself with all the ardor of his nature. He had succeeded, and the thought brought to him a satisfaction beyond all words. Now the dead could rest in peace.

And then his thoughts turned to more recent

events. He wondered a bit uneasily how Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston were progressing with their venture. He had seen no mention in the papers of the *Blue Gull* having been sighted. Had its aviators found the Island of the Cross of Palms? Would they find it? The pearls? And, looming up as a sinister figure, the devil-fish?

He was aroused sharply from his musings by a gust of wind that caused the *Silver Streak* to careen crazily. He righted it quickly, but another gust came and still another, each more violent than the last.

The sky became as black as ink. The wind roared like demons let loose. Jagged streaks of lightning shot across the heavens.

Then, with a howl like that of a cyclone, the storm broke!

CHAPTER VI

Swept toward the Cataract

So terrific was the force of the gale that it threw the *Silver Streak* completely over, and Ted Scott found himself flying upside down, his head toward the earth, his feet toward the skies.

By a superb exhibition of craftsmanship, the young aviator righted the plane and scudded before the wind with the speed of a meteor.

The sky was crashing with thunder and flashing with lightning and Ted was almost deafened by the strife of the elements.

It was out of the question to seek a landing, for he would have struck the earth at such a terrific gait that the plane would have been smashed to bits. All that remained to him was to bend all his efforts toward guiding the plane and keeping it on an even keel.

And this taxed his strength to the utmost, for the wind veered so rapidly that at times it seemed to be coming from all quarters at once and the *Silver Streak* was tossed about as in a maelstrom. It seemed impossible that that

tiny structure, a mere dot in the skies, should survive the furious onslaught of the tornado. For by this time it was nothing less than that.

Ted had been caught in many storms, but this transcended anything in his experience. But he kept his head and jockeyed the plane as a skilful rider does a frightened steed, yielding here, turning there, seeking to use the wind as an ally rather than fight it as an enemy.

Now to the gale's terrors was added another danger. A bolt of lightning whipped out of the skies, and Ted knew from the shock which followed that the plane had been hit.

Balls of fire rolled along the struts and the rim of the right wing showed a scarlet thread. That tiny thread grew brighter and larger, and Ted watched it with fascinated eyes while his heart beat like a triphammer.

Now, fanned by the gale, spurts of tiny flame leaped from that scarlet thread. The plane was on fire!

There was no way of climbing out on that wing and putting out the blaze. Ted would have been swept away by the gale in an instant.

He cast a despairing glance beneath. All below him was as black as Egypt's night. For all he knew, he might be over a mountain or a forest. To swoop down in the forlorn hope of making a landing would be to court almost certain death.

Yet death seemed certain if he remained aloft.

He felt the parachutes strapped to his back to see that they were in perfect shape and got ready to jump, for the flames were flickering higher and the plane seemed doomed.

Then the windows of heaven opened and the rain, which up to then had held off, came down in torrents!

In a twinkling the whole situation was changed. The fire went out with a hissing and a splutter as the rain drenched it.

Ted himself was soaked as the water dashed in the window of the cockpit. But he cared little for that. He was saved!

He tested the wing to see how well it responded. To his infinite relief, it worked perfectly. The fire had evidently not had time to eat into the structure, but had been confined to the outer fabric.

He listened to the roar of the engine. It was buzzing along without missing a beat. The bolt must have struck it a glancing blow that had not shattered the mechanism.

There still remained the gale to reckon with, but this was now subsiding. Little by little the wind abated, the lightning grew more infrequent, and the thunder retired, growling, into its cavern. Later on the clouds rifted and the stars peeped out.

Then for the first time Ted Scott realized that he was ravenously hungry. He took a sandwich from his store, a drink of coffee from his thermos bottle, and permitted himself to relax, while the gallant plane kept evenly on its course.

All through the night the *Silver Streak* flew, with Ted Scott keeping an unwinking eye on the controls and instruments, and when morning dawned he had covered the larger part of his journey to Denver.

He had resolved that as soon as the morning was well advanced he would look about him for a suitable landing spot and repair whatever damage might have been done to the wing of his plane.

Most of the country over which he was then flying was rough and hilly, and his search was for some time without avail.

He crossed a river that ran for some distance through the country and terminated in a cataract. Over the brink its waters rushed with tremendous force to fall in a welter of foam and spray on the rocks below.

About a mile above the cataract the banks were broad and level and seemed to offer a safe spot for a landing. Ted circled about, inspecting the ground narrowly, and when he had picked out an appropriate place, brought the *Silver Streak* down with scarcely a jar.

Ted was an expert mechanic, as deft with an airplane as a jeweler with a watch. He was relieved to find that no structural damage had been done to the wing, and with the material he had at hand he was able to make adequate repairs.

He had worked for perhaps half an hour when he was startled by shouts that came from the direction of the river. There was terror in the cries that startled him at once into attention.

Near the center of the stream, which was at this point about two hundred yards wide, a canoe was being carried along by the current.

In the frail craft were two youngsters who seemed to be about ten or twelve years old. They were shouting at the top of their lungs for help.

Ted Scott thought of the cataract. Nothing could go over its brink and live!

To think, with Ted, was to act. In a flash he had pulled off his coat and plunged into the stream.

He was an expert swimmer, and as he rose after his dive and shook the water from his eyes he struck out strongly, not in the direction of the boat, which would have required him to cut directly across the current, but at an angle that he calculated would enable him to converge

on the boat before it had passed a certain point.

It was close figuring, with two lives at stake, perhaps three, for Ted was fully aware that he was risking his life to save the little voyagers. There would be a point where no human strength could struggle against the force of the stream. That point once reached, he himself would be as helpless as those he was trying to save. Everything depended upon his reaching the boat before the current grew too strong to be resisted.

With all the strength of his powerful muscles he clove the water, getting ever nearer and nearer the boat. His arms and feet worked like piston rods.

Now the water was becoming more turbulent as it felt the pull of the cataract. Where there had been ripples, were now ridges topped with flecks of foam.

The boys had seen Ted coming, and their cries for him to hurry became more frantic. In their agitation they stood up in the canoe, tipping it so that it threatened to capsize at any moment.

Ted shouted to them to sit down, and fortunately they were not yet so bereft of their senses as to disobey. They huddled down in the boat, pitiful figures with their eyes fixed wildly on their deliverer.

But would he be their deliverer? Or were all three doomed to a terrible death?

Ted's lungs seemed almost bursting with his exertions. He was within a few yards now of the boat, but the canoe was increasing speed with every moment.

Fairly lifting himself out of the water, Ted Scott lunged forward at the bow of the canoe. He missed it. But another frenzied clutch caught the stern as it swept past. Caught and held!

He worked his way hand over hand until he had reached the bow. A glance inside as he passed along showed him that there were no paddles in the bottom of the boat.

He had clung to the hope that they would be there. If they had been, his plan was to climb in and attempt desperately to paddle to the nearer shore. With luck and the Ted Scott pluck he might have made it.

His heart sank as the cataract thundered in his ears, its roar becoming louder and louder!

CHAPTER VII

In the Nick of Time

Instinctively Ted Scott trod water and tried to back up his body and hold the boat back against the current. But this he abandoned almost instantly as useless.

Both he and the canoe were being carried resistlessly along to the brink of the cataract while the roar in his ears sounded like the knell of doom.

But even in this desperate, almost hopeless, situation, Ted Scott still retained his ability to think clearly and act swiftly.

A glance ahead showed him that the river narrowed as it approached the falls.

On the further shore stood a great tree whose lower boughs dipped toward the flood. One in particular extended for some distance out over the stream.

Swimming with his feet and one hand and holding on to the bow of the canoe with the other hand, Ted struck out for the tree.

Here his superb stamina stood him in stead.

Tired as he was, he still had a reserve upon which he could draw, and now he threw it all into a life and death struggle.

On and on the current carried him with ever increasing swiftness. Foot by foot, yard by yard, Ted cut across it at an angle that steadily brought him nearer to the tree.

But by this time Ted was almost exhausted. His head was reeling, his eyes glazing. His mental turmoil had added to his physical weariness. He felt as though he were losing consciousness. By a supreme exertion of will he fought back the growing faintness and got a grip on himself.

Now he was close to the tree. Could he reach that extended bough? And if he reached it, could he hold on against the tug of the current? It was his only chance of salvation.

The boat swept close to the end of the bough and Ted, with almost the last flicker of his strength, leaped half out of the water and caught it with the clutch of a drowning man.

As he grasped the branch, he flung his legs into the boat and held it to him. Then he reached up his other hand, now freed, and tightened his hold upon the bough.

The current snarled like a beast balked of its prey and sought to tear the boat away from his feet. But Ted's toes were under the rim of the bow and this gave him a purchase.

He held on with his hands for a moment, panting and gasping. Then slowly he began to pull himself along the branch toward the shore, drawing the boat with his feet behind him.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, he fought his way along until the bow of the canoe touched the shore.

"Jump, boys, jump to the bank!" he commanded.

The little fellows did as they were told and scrambled up the bank to safety. Ted worked himself along the bough until his eyes saw that solid ground was beneath him. Then he dropped.

The canoe, released from the hold of Ted's feet, was caught in the swirling waters and a moment later was hurled over the brink of the cataract, to be smashed into fragments on the rocks below.

Ted lay sprawled out on the grassy bank, too exhausted to move a limb. That terrible struggle had taken its toll of him. His breath came in great sobbing gasps. He felt as though he never wanted to stir again.

He shuddered as he listened to the roar of the cataract. Had he failed at the crucial moment, three broken bodies would now be tossing about in the welter of foam below.

In a semiconscious state, he lay there for

some little time before he took note of his surroundings. Then, as life and strength came back to him, he lifted himself to a sitting position and looked at the boys he had rescued.

They were manly little fellows, and they were gazing at their rescuer with eyes full of adoration.

"Oh, aren't you brave?" exclaimed the elder of the two, a boy of twelve. "I don't believe there's a man in the world as brave as you."

Ted smiled at his boyish enthusiasm.

"Lots of them, sonny," he said. "I just happened to be on hand. But you kids certainly had a close call. What do you call yourselves?"

"My name's Jack," the lad answered. "Jack Marston. And this is my brother Bob. What's your name?"

"My name's Scott," replied Ted. "Ted Scott."

"My daddy was telling us about a man of that name," said Jack. "He said the man flew over the Atlantic Ocean. I guess he was a good deal older than you, though. A man would have to be pretty old to do a thing like that."

"Oh, there are plenty of Scotts in the world," replied Ted evasively. "But now tell me about yourselves. Where do you live and how did you come to be in the canoe?"

"We live just a little way from here," put in Bob. "We were playing in the canoe and

it broke loose from the rope. Daddy'll scold us, I guess."

"I don't think Daddy will do much scolding this time," replied Ted reassuringly. "Well, I suppose it's up to me to get you kids home. Let's move on. Hello! What's that? Sounds like a runaway."

The "that" was a frantic tattoo of hoofs coming along the road that bordered the bank of the river. A moment later a horse and buggy came into sight, the man, white as death, driving like mad, while a sobbing woman sat in the seat beside him.

"Dad! Mother!" shouted the lads, waving their hands and dancing up and down.

There was a wild shout from the driver, a cry of rapturous delight from the woman. The man brought the horse to a stop. Then both man and woman leaped out, and the next moment had gathered the boys into their arms and were smothering them with kisses and caresses while the tears rolled unrestrainedly down their cheeks.

"Thank God, oh, thank God!" exclaimed the man brokenly.

"My precious boys!" sobbed the woman. "Oh, God is good! He is good!"

Ted stood quietly aside, moved deeply by the affecting reunion.

"And we thought you had surely gone over

the falls!" sobbed the woman. "Oh, how did you get to shore?"

"It was this man did it," explained Jack, pointing to Ted. "He's awfully brave, Mother. He jumped into the water and caught up to the boat and then he grabbed a branch and pulled himself and us to the shore. It made him awfully tired. I told him I didn't think there was as brave a man as he was in the world."

For the first time the man and woman became aware of Ted's presence as he stood there in the dripping clothes that would have told the story without the lad's explanation.

With one accord they rose to their feet and went toward him with words of gratitude. The man grasped Ted's hand as though he would wrench it from the socket. The woman then took his hand and patted it caressingly.

"Oh, how can we ever thank you enough?" she exclaimed brokenly.

"It was simple enough," Ted remarked, with some embarrassment. "I saw the kids were in trouble and I helped them out. That's all."

"That's all!" repeated the man. "You knew they were going toward the cataract and that the chances were that you, too, would go over, yet you jumped in to save them. It was the act of a hero. You've put us in your debt for life."

"Say, he's got a name just like that man you

were telling us about!" put in Bob importantly. "You know, the man that flew over the Atlantic Ocean. Ted Scott, wasn't it?"

The man took in Ted's aviator's suit and his eyes lighted up.

"You don't mean—it can't be—that you are *the* Ted Scott, the man that all the world knows and idolizes!" he exclaimed, incredulity blending with delight.

Ted shifted about uneasily in his wet clothes.

"It's a foolish old world, if it does all that," he replied with a smile. "But, yes, I had the luck to get across the Atlantic. But you mustn't hold it against me," he added whimsically.

The delight of his new acquaintances passed all bounds. Ted Scott in the flesh!

"I can understand now why you plunged in to save my boys at the risk of your life!" exclaimed the man. "The man who had the nerve to dare the Atlantic might be expected to do just such a thing."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" asked Bob reproachfully, and they all laughed.

"I can tell you why, dear," said Bob's mother, as she stroked the boy's head. "It's because he's as modest as he is brave. Real heroes are like that."

"You must come home with me and be my guest for as long as possible," urged the man

warmly. "By the way, in all this excitement I've forgotten to introduce myself. My name's Marston and this is Mrs. Marston. I live only a couple of miles from here. I'll be proud and happy if you'll come along with us."

"Oh, do," urged Mrs. Marston.

"It's awfully good of you," replied Ted. "But I'm on my way to Denver and I've already been delayed by an accident to my plane. I was fixing it when this thing happened. By the way, it's on the other side of the river and I don't know how to get over to it."

"Don't let that bother you," replied Mr. Marston. "There's a bridge just a little way beyond my house. I'll drop my wife and the kids at the house and then take you to your plane in the buggy. But I do wish you could stay with us for a while."

They crowded into the vehicle and drove to the Marston home, a handsome, spacious house situated in beautiful grounds. There Mrs. Marston and the children alighted, and after reiterated expressions of gratitude from them all, Mr. Marston and Ted drove on, crossed the bridge and came back on the other side to the spot where Ted had left the *Silver Streak.*

Mr. Marston, himself an engineer and capable of appreciating the fine points of the machine, was enthusiastic in his praise of the gallant plane that had so much historical value

attached to it because of its record-breaking flight to Honolulu.

Only a few minutes were required to finish the repairs, and Ted resumed his helmet and climbed into the cockpit.

"Mere words are too feeble to express my thanks," said Mr. Marston, as he shook hands in farewell. "But for all our lives you will be in our grateful thoughts."

"I'm happy that I had the chance," returned Ted, as he settled himself at the controls.

With a whiz and a roar the engine began to function and the *Silver Streak,* after taxiing a few hundred yards, lifted itself into the air and resumed its interrupted journey.

Ted ached in every bone of his body from the terrific strain he had been under, but his heart was jubilant. The lightning stroke had been a friend in disguise. If it had not struck, the plane would not have come down for repairs, and the happy home he was leaving behind him would now have been brooding beneath the shadow of tragedy.

As Ted Scott sped along, the scenery grew more familiar. He was in the mountain district now, and he mounted to a height of fifteen thousand feet to make sure of clearing the summit. He was of no mind to repeat the experience of that fearful day when he and Frank Bruin had crashed against one of those rugged

crags and gone hurtling to the ground below to find themselves lost in a trackless wilderness.

Shortly after noon he caught sight of the towers and tall buildings of Denver, his destination, the Rocky Mountain headquarters of Ted's special division of the Air Mail Service.

He skirted the city and soon was hovering over the airport. News of his coming had preceded him, and, as was always the case, had called out a crowd to greet him.

Ted circled the field in graceful spirals and then came down to a skilful landing, to be received with cheers as he stepped from the cockpit.

There were the old standbys, Bill Twombley, Roy Benedict and Ed Allenby, comrades of Ted's in the service, who were hilarious in their welcome and mauled and pounded him to their hearts' content.

"Where do I come in?" asked a voice behind him.

Ted whirled about to find himself face to face with Walter Hapworth.

CHAPTER VIII

A Possible Clue

Ted Scott's eyes lighted up as his hand sprang out to meet that of his friend, Walter Hapworth.

"Why, Walter!" he exclaimed, for their relations had got past the formal stage when he addressed the promoter as "Mr. Hapworth," "what good wind blew you down this way? I had an idea that you were in San Francisco, looking after your airplane factory."

"I have been till recently," returned Walter Hapworth, with a smile. "But I had a contract to close with some of the Denver people, and as it is rather a big deal I thought I would come up in person rather than leave it to one of my men. But I confess that one thing that influenced my decision was the hope of meeting you here."

"I'm certainly pleased to see you," declared Ted. "I've got a lot of things to talk with you about. Where are you staying?"

"At the Palace Hotel," returned Hapworth.

"I'll be with you for a week or two. Suppose you run up to see me to-night? I don't want to monopolize you now, with so many of your friends trying to shake hands and have a word with you."

"I'll be there with bells on," said Ted. "Gee, but it's good to see you again!"

With a wave of his hand Hapworth melted into the crowd, and Ted was finally drawn aside by Bill and Roy and Ed, who finally bore him off for a talk at their quarters.

"Hasn't seemed like the same old place since you've been away," declared Bill.

"What kind of a trip did you have?" asked Roy.

"Oh, about the same as usual," replied Ted, "except that I ran into a storm last night and lightning struck the plane. But it didn't do much damage, and I pulled through all right."

"Suppose to-day has been rather peaceful though," put in Ed Allenby, in a tone of inquiry.

"Oh, yes," replied Ted, with a yawn.

His three friends looked at each other and burst into a roar of laughter.

"What's the joke?" asked Ted, in some surprise. "Let me in on it."

"He calls it peaceful," chuckled Ed. "Haven't seen the scare headlines in the after-

noon papers, have you? But of course you haven't."

"'Daring Rescue by Ted Scott!'" quoted Bill Twombley, with a grin. "'America's Idol Risks His Life for Children! Nearly Swept over the Brink of a Cataract!' And so on and so on."

Ted looked embarrassed.

"Oh, that!" he said sheepishly.

"Oh, that!" mimicked Roy. "Nothing else than that. A mere trifle. Hardly worth mentioning."

"How in the mischief did that get into the papers?" asked Ted.

"The daddy of the kids telegraphed it in," replied Bill. "Fellow by the name of Marston. If you could only see what he says about you! He sure thinks you're the goods."

They plied Ted with questions which he answered in monosyllables and reluctantly.

"No use, fellows," said Ed in mock despair. "You can't get anything out of him. A clam's talkative compared with Ted."

"Let's change the subject," suggested Ted. "How about the fellows that were sick, Rumbold and Challis? I didn't see them in the crowd."

"They're getting along all right, but it'll be a week or more before they'll be able to report for duty," replied Ed. "Gee, but we've needed

you, Ted! The substitutes are nice boys, but they're not familiar with the routes, and the mails have been behind time and the service has suffered. Things will improve a lot now that you're back. And there isn't any Felwig to bother you now."

"No," put in Bill with a grin. "That rat's caning chairs now in prison."

Felwig was the aviator mentioned in the third book of this series, who, moved by envy of Ted, had twice attempted the latter's life, once by a bomb and again by cutting the struts of his plane.

"Well, I'm glad he's where the dogs can't bite him," remarked Ted, with a smile. "He certainly was an uncomfortable kind of a fellow to have about."

The conversation ran along different channels for a time, and then his comrades left Ted, so that he could have a few hours of the sleep he so sorely needed.

He slept heavily until dark, and then, after a hot bath and a good supper, set out to pay his promised call on his friend, Walter Hapworth.

The latter, Ted counted among the dearest friends he had on earth. As previously stated, it was Hapworth who had given Ted his chance to learn flying and he had also financed the trip across the Atlantic. He was a very able busi-

ness man, and his advice to Ted had been of great service on many occasions.

Ted's achievements in flying had given Hapworth a bent in the same direction and he had become a very capable aviator. He had accompanied Ted as navigator on the latter's trip over the Pacific, and the many dangers they had met and surmounted together on that momentous flight had still further cemented their friendship.

Ted found Mr. Hapworth waiting for him, and they were soon comfortably ensconced in easy chairs in the suite that the business man occupied.

"I see you've been up to your old tricks again," remarked Mr. Hapworth, as he pointed toward the evening paper he had been reading.

"They won't leave me alone," complained Ted in a tone so solemn that his host burst into laughter.

"Well, it's your own fault. If you will keep on risking your life for others, you can't blame the newspapers for playing it up. They just eat up that kind of copy."

"I'll have to do things under cover if I want to feel that I belong to myself," and Ted grinned, though a bit ruefully.

"I guess that's the only solution," laughed Mr. Hapworth. "How did you leave things in Bromville?"

"Not very good," replied Ted, and he went on to relate the attack upon the Brownings.

Mr. Hapworth was shocked beyond expression, for he had a warm place in his heart for the old couple.

"I hope they capture the scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "They ought to be put behind the bars for life."

"Not much chance, I fear," replied Ted regretfully. "I've offered a reward and Mr. Monet doubled it. But so far it hasn't helped us find the robbers."

"Speaking of Monet," said Hapworth, "is he still in Bromville? It's some time since I've heard from Paul."

"I think at the present moment he's somewhere over the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, or the West Indies," replied Ted. "I'd give a good deal to know."

"What?" exclaimed Walter Hapworth, in surprise. "You don't mean that he's gone off on a flying trip? First time I've heard of it. I didn't know that he was especially interested in aviation."

"I guess he's got the bug just as we have," returned Ted. "He's learned to fly fairly well. I gave him a few lessons while I was in Bromville. But he hasn't gone alone. Tom Ralston—you've heard me speak of him—a fine

fellow and a dandy airman, has gone along to handle the plane."

"Why the West Indies?" asked Hapworth. "It's a pretty dangerous place with its sudden hurricanes. I should think he'd have picked out some other route for a pleasure trip."

"It isn't exactly a pleasure trip," explained Ted. "There's a good deal of business mixed up in it, and a mighty profitable business, if he succeeds. He's really on a treasure hunt."

"A treasure hunt!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth, with quickened interest. "That sounds exciting. What kind of treasure?"

"Pearls," replied Ted. "I'll tell you all about it. Mr. Monet told it to me under my pledge that I wouldn't reveal it to a living soul, with the single exception of yourself. Here goes."

While Mr. Hapworth listened with the keenest interest Ted Scott unfolded the plan of the Monet expedition.

"Well," said Hapworth, drawing a long breath when Ted had finished, "you surely have me all worked up. But with the devilfish and all, there's much risk connected with the trip."

"There surely is!" agreed Ted. "I'm beginning to be worried because the plane hasn't been reported. With its bright color, the *Blue Gull* is a striking object, and you'd think

there'd be some mention in the ship news of it's having been seen or of having landed somewhere."

"We'll hope that no news is good news," observed Mr. Hapworth. "It would be a great blow to me if anything happened to Paul. He's one of Nature's noblemen."

"Right you are!" agreed Ted warmly, "and the same goes for Tom Ralston, too. He's true blue."

"I hope they find the island of pearls," mused Hapworth.

"And I hope they don't find the devilfish," added Ted.

"Or sharks either, which is more likely," said Hapworth. "There are no bigger or more savage man-eaters in the world than are found in the Caribbean Sea."

They sat till late discussing their absent friends and other matters of mutual interest, and then separated for the night.

The next morning Ted reported for duty, to the immense satisfaction of Maxwell Bruin, the head of the corporation by which Ted Scott was employed.

"We've missed you sorely, my boy," said Mr. Bruin, a big, shaggy man who felt a deep sense of gratitude and affection for the lad, owing to the fact that Ted had at one time saved the life of Frank Bruin, the man's only

son. "The new recruits have been doing the best they could, but they're novices as yet, and things have been at loose ends on your route. Now we'll get going again."

Ted himself was delighted to be at the work, perilous as it was because it involved traveling over the Rockies. His home was in the air. If for any reason he could no longer sail through the ether he would feel like a man sentenced to life imprisonment. Flying was in his blood.

Several days passed, then a week, before Ted Scott had news of the West Indian flyers. Then one day he ran across an item in the paper saying that the *Blue Gull* had been seen over Cuba.

He showed the item to Mr. Hapworth, who scanned it with great interest.

"Over Cuba," he remarked. "I wonder whether it was going or returning?"

"This paper doesn't say in what direction the plane was going," replied Ted. "It might be either. If they're still in search of the pearls, they must have been delayed, had to make repairs or something, for they ought to have reached Cuba ten days ago. If they were coming back they ought to reach Bromville within the next day or two. Mr. Monet said that he'd wire me the minute he got back."

But no telegram came, nor, though Ted searched each day's paper from end to end,

was there any further mention of the *Blue Gull.* With every day that passed his uneasiness increased.

Nor was that uneasiness lessened when he read one day that a terrific hurricane had swept over the West Indies. Immense havoc had been wrought. All of the islands had suffered in greater or less degree. Whole towns had been leveled to the ground. Great forests lay in swaths. Ships had been driven ashore. All accounts agreed that it was one of the most devastating gales that had visited the archipelago in years.

The faces of both Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth were very grave as they read and commented on the news.

"If they were aloft, the *Blue Gull* couldn't have lived through that hurricane," observed Ted.

"And even if they were on the ground, they may have been involved in the common destruction," added Mr. Hapworth. "The account says that some of the smaller islands have disappeared. There may have been some subterranean convulsion going on at the same time that engulfed them, and from what you tell me, this island that they were seeking was little more than a spit of coral or sand. I'm mightily worried about them."

"Same here," echoed Ted. "But, of course,

we may be borrowing trouble. Tom Ralston's a fellow of great resource, and it would have to be a mighty tight place that he couldn't wriggle through. It's hard luck, though, that that hurricane should have come just at this time."

Ted Scott was not without further causes of anxiety. The last letter that he had received from Eben told him that Charity was down with what the doctor feared might be pneumonia, and Ted knew how fatal that dread disease might be to one of her age.

"She keeps talking of you all the time," Eben had said in his letter. "Talking of you and looking at your picture. I catch her crying when I go in. She needs you badly, Ted. Wish you were here," the letter had concluded wistfully.

Dear old Charity! Dear Charity, who had been a mother to him! Talking of him! Crying! Looking at his picture! Needing him badly!

Ted's resolution was taken on the instant. He sought out Mr. Bruin and stated the case. The mere statement was enough.

"Course, it's all right for you to go," roared the president of the company. "Shall miss you badly, but the old lady needs you. Beat it and stay as long as she wants you. And let me know how she's getting along."

Ted thanked the bluff man and made instant

preparation for his departure. He sought out Mr. Hapworth and stated his intention.

"Of course, it's the only thing for you to do," declared Walter Hapworth. "When do you start?"

"To-morrow morning," answered Ted.

"Got room for a passenger?"

"You bet I have, if you're the passenger," returned Ted delightedly.

"That's who it is," replied Mr. Hapworth. "I've finished my work here and there are some things connected with the golf course business in Bromville that I want to look after. Was thinking of going there by train, but it will be bully if you take me along."

"That's dandy!" declared Ted warmly. "Be at the airport about eight o'clock and we'll get off. Gee, but I'm glad you're flying with me. I'll telegraph Eben to-night that he can expect us."

They had good weather and made the trip without incident, arriving in Bromville the day after they started.

And what a reception Ted got when he reached the old home! Eben was delighted beyond words. And Charity! She was carried out of herself, hugged and kissed Ted frantically, clung to him as though she could never let him go. Smiles and tears were mingled, but they were happy tears, healing tears, and from

the very beginning of Ted's return she began to mend.

"Your coming has done her more good than all my medicine," declared Doctor Meredith the day after Ted's arrival. "I was about ready to give her up, but you've proved to be the tonic that she needed. Her heart and soul are bound up in you, Ted, and she was pining to death. But you've wrought a surprising change and now I believe she'll pull through."

The doctor's prediction was justified. Charity did pull through. Ted gave her practically all his time, reading to her, talking to her and letting her hold his hand as she dropped off to sleep, and within a few days the doctor pronounced her out of danger.

In all this time there had been no word of the *Blue Gull,* and Ted Scott's heart was under a constant burden for his absent friends. Not content with depending on the newspapers, he had sent a score or more of cablegrams to the chief cities of the West Indies asking for news of the missing plane. But nothing seemed to have been seen or heard of her.

One evening, after Charity had fallen asleep, Ted was chatting with Eben in the hotel office when an old farmer, Ezra Huddleston by name, a lifelong friend of the Brownings, dropped in.

The conversation turned on the robbery and

Eben brought out the clubs that had figured in it so that Ezra might have a look at them.

"Pretty hefty sticks," commented Ezra, as he took one of them in his hands and examined it curiously. "But gosh!" he added in a startled tone. "Look at the wood they're made of!"

"What about the wood?" asked Ted, in some surprise at the old farmer's exclamation.

"There's just this about it," replied Ezra. "That wood was growed on my farm. There ain't any of that particular kind o' wood on any other farm within twenty miles of here. Don't often sell much of it, 'cause I'm ruther proud of it as a curiosity. Did sell a cord of it, though, a little while ago."

"Whom did you sell it to?" asked Ted eagerly.

"To Brewster Gale," replied Ezra. "He kind o' took a fancy to it. Thought it would burn good in them open fireplaces he has in his hotel. Makes mighty pretty flames. So I sold him—Jiminy! what's the matter with you, Ted?"

CHAPTER IX

On the Trail

What Ezra Huddleston said operated on Ted Scott like an electric shock. Light burst in upon him. He sprang to his feet.

"Are you quite sure, Ezra," he asked, "that you sold that wood to no one but Brewster Gale?"

"To no one else whatsoever," replied Ezra. "He took the whole lot that I cut. An' I haven't sold any of that particular kind for five years past. You don't s'pose, though, that a rich man like Brewster Gale would make clubs out of it an' go burglin', do you?" and the old fellow laughed boisterously at the thought.

"No, no, certainly not," replied Ted, resuming his seat and speaking carelessly. "As you say, there isn't any of that kind but yours within twenty miles of here, but there's doubtless plenty of it in other sections of the country. Just a little coincidence, that's all."

The conversation turned into other channels, but Ted let Eben and Ezra do most of the talk-

ing. His mind was busy with his thoughts.

Those two figures that he had seen melting into the darkness of the night! The Gale twins almost always went together.

What was it Mark Lawson had said about the twins having looked seedy and then having suddenly blossomed out into new clothes so striking as to attract attention? Where had they secured the money?

And now this wood of which the clubs were made! In the possession only of Brewster Gale and of course readily accessible to his sons!

There was nothing conclusive about any one of these three things taken separately. But together they at least afforded ground for grave suspicion.

To be sure, Brewster Gale was still fairly rich and at first sight it seemed absurd that his sons should resort to robbery. But Ted had heard from Mr. Hapworth, who had rooms at the Hotel Excelsior, of violent quarrels between father and sons because of their squandering of money, their poker losses, their numerous debts which he had had to settle.

Might it not be possible that he had shut down on their supplies? That would have explained their seedy appearance. And in their desperate desire to keep on with their wild and dissipated life might not the twins have re-

sorted to the readiest means at hand to secure money?

There was certainly nothing in their character that forbade the supposition. They were bad clear through. More than once they had escaped jail simply because their father with his money had bought off the complainants against them.

Had they not on several occasions sought to injure or kill Ted himself?

Then too, the character of the assault upon Eben and Charity was in harmony with the nature of the rascals. They were cowards. A daring robbery was beyond them. But it was easy to strike down an old man from behind and then waylay a frail old woman.

The more Ted mulled the matter over in his mind the more confident he became that he was right. But how to prove it?

Ezra stayed a little while longer and then took his leave. As soon as he had gone Eben turned to Ted.

"Out with it, my boy," he said. "What's troubling you?"

"Can't you guess?" asked Ted.

"Something about the clubs and the wood they're made of," replied Eben.

"And the man that bought that wood," added Ted. "Gale himself is out of the question. But how about those worthless sons of his?"

Eben slapped his thigh excitedly.

"Greg and Duck Gale!" he exclaimed. "By jiminy, Ted, there may be something in that! I wouldn't put it past them."

"Nor I," said Ted, and went on to tell the old man of his theory and the facts that seemed to support it.

Eben listened with the closest attention.

"Seems like you may be right, Ted," he said, when the lad had finished, "though I don't know how far those facts would go in a court of law."

"They wouldn't go far unless I can get something else that's more definite," admitted Ted thoughtfully. "But that's what I'm going to try to do."

"I tell you what," suggested Eben. "Talk it over with Mr. Hapworth. He's living at the Excelsior and may have some inside information."

"That's good advice," observed Ted. "I'll see him the first thing to-morrow."

Ted called on his friend the following day and laid before him his suspicions.

"I think you're on the right track, Ted," Mr. Hapworth said when he had heard the story. "Those fellows are quite capable of the crime. They are about as rascally a pair of dogs as I've ever seen. But even if they're guilty, I'm afraid they're beyond your reach."

"You mean because of their father's money?" queried Ted.

"Not that," replied his friend. "I mean out of your reach physically. They've cleared out."

"Since when?" asked Ted, considerably upset by the information.

"I don't know exactly," replied Mr. Hapworth. "Several days ago. Their father's dreadfully cut up about it. Worthless as they are, he thinks a lot of his sons."

"Don't you think he knows himself where they've gone?" queried Ted.

"That I don't know," was the reply.

"Then I'm going to find out whether he knows or not," declared Ted.

"Going to beard the lion in his den?" asked Mr. Hapworth, with a smile. "He hasn't any love for you, you know, Ted, since you helped take the golf course away from him."

"I know he hasn't," admitted Ted. "But that isn't going to stop me."

"Well, go to it. I doubt whether he'll willingly give you any information, but he may be surprised into doing it."

"When's the best time to see him?" asked Ted.

"In the afternoon. He's pretty busy around the hotel in the morning. But between three and five in the afternoon he's usually alone in

his office, looking over his books. That's the best time to call."

"I'll be up here this afternoon," declared Ted, as he rose to take his leave.

"All right. Let me know how you make out."

Ted promised that he would and departed.

At four that afternoon, carrying in his hand a carefully wrapt package, Ted Scott knocked on the door of Brewster Gale's office.

"Come in," said a gruff voice.

Ted went in.

The proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior was seated with his back to the door, busily engaged with some papers on his desk. He paid no attention to the newcomer at first, doubtless thinking that it was one of his employees.

Brewster Gale was a bulky, heavy-jowled man, well into his fifties. He was elaborately dressed, overdressed in fact, and diamonds sparkled on his hands and in his tie. Suave and urbane to the patrons of his hotel or any one from whom he hoped to make money, he was arrogant and overbearing to others. Money was his god, and he would go to almost any lengths to secure it.

"Well, what is it?" he asked at length, wheeling about in his chair to face the visitor.

"Ted Scott!" he exclaimed in surprise, and a glare leaped into his eyes.

Ted faced him calmly.

"Yes, Mr. Gale," he said, "it's Ted Scott."

"Get out of this office!" roared Gale.

"Not till I've said what I came to say," replied Ted coolly.

"Have I got to put you out?" stormed Gale, rising angrily to his feet.

"I wouldn't advise you to do that," said Ted. "Perhaps, after all, you'd rather talk to me than to Dugan, the chief of police."

A look of apprehension came into Gale's eyes and he wilted perceptibly.

"What do you mean by that?" he growled.

"I'll tell you, if you'll listen."

Gale hesitated a moment and then sat down heavily in his chair.

"Spit it out," he commanded curtly. "Say what you've got to say and then get out."

Ted took a chair without invitation.

"I hear that Greg and Duck have left town," began Ted. "I wanted to ask you where they had gone."

"None of your business," Gale blurted out.

"It's very much my business," declared Ted, speaking evenly.

"Do they owe you any money?" asked Gale.

"They owe me an explanation of certain things," was the reply. "Perhaps it might be more correct to say that they owe the law an explanation."

Again Gale's eyes showed fear.

Ted, scanning him closely, was surprised to note how the man had changed. The old bluster was there, but it rang false. He had aged noticeably. His figure had shrunken and his face was deeply lined. It was evident that trouble sat heavily on him.

"Speak out plainly," said Gale, his voice perceptibly less harsh.

"I will," promised Ted.

Deliberately he unwrapped the object he had brought with him.

"This," he said, as he extended a club toward Gale, "is the club that struck down Eben Browning. You can see Eben's blood and his gray hairs on it. That club is made of a certain kind of wood found only in this house. The club that struck down Charity Browning is similar to this. Two people in this house shaped those clubs. Two people from this house used them!"

CHAPTER X

A Stunning Blow

The sight of the club that Ted Scott displayed had a tremendous effect upon Brewster Gale. He gazed at it with dawning terror, and as he looked his face became ashen.

Then like a man in a trance Gale extended his hand and took the club and examined it, his eyes bulging. It dropped from his nerveless fingers and clattered to the floor.

The miserable man slumped back in his chair, trembling like a leaf, and covered his face with his hands. Ted, despite his intense dislike for Gale, at that moment felt sorry for him. After all, with all his bad qualities, he was a father and his sons were dear to him.

After a moment, Gale removed his hands from his eyes and looked miserably at Ted.

"You—you haven't said anything about this to the police, have you?" he asked in a voice that shook.

"No," replied Ted. "I thought I would see you first."

"And—and you won't say anything?" implored Gale. "I will make good the loss. I'm not admitting that my boys had anything to do with the robbery. But I don't want to have them charged with it. I'll pay to have the matter dropped."

"I'm not making any promises," replied Ted. "I won't agree to compound a felony. The time has come for perfect frankness between us, Mr. Gale. I'll go this far, though. I won't put the police on their track. I won't bring them under suspicion as far as this town is concerned. But I'm going to try to find them myself and clear this matter up. If they're innocent, they have nothing to fear. If they're guilty, they'll have to take their punishment."

Gale was in a state of almost utter collapse. All his arrogance had vanished. He was shaking like a man with a palsy.

"My sons!" he exclaimed brokenly.

"What I said about the police goes only if you tell me the truth," went on Ted. "I've laid my cards on the table. You must lay yours. I want to know where your sons have gone."

"I don't know," replied Gale miserably.

Ted looked at him sharply. Ordinarily he would have had no confidence in the word of Brewster Gale. But he felt sure now that he

was telling the truth. There was anguish in his words that was too real to be assumed.

"Haven't you any idea at all?" asked Ted.

"To South America somewhere," answered Gale. "I guess that from some steamer booklets that I found in their rooms after they had gone. But I don't know."

"It takes a lot of money to go to South America," observed Ted.

"They had it," said Gale, now in a state of utter collapse, his long pent-up grief seeking an outlet, regardless of consequences. "They robbed me before they went."

The moment he had spoken he seemed to want to recall the statement.

"I guess I'm talking wildly," he muttered. "Pay no attention to what I say. I'm—I'm kind of broken up this afternoon."

The man's suffering was so genuine that Ted was touched with pity. He re-wrapped the club and stood up.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Gale," he said gently and went out of the office.

He sought out Walter Hapworth and told him the story of his interview.

Mr. Hapworth emitted a long whistle.

"So that's the way the land lies!" he ejaculated. "Wound up by robbing their own father! The low-down, yellow curs!"

"I couldn't help feeling sorry for Mr. Gale,"

remarked Ted. "I never saw a more complete breakdown."

"I'm sorry for the man, too," agreed Mr. Hapworth, "though he's responsible for a large part of it. He's been up to shady tricks all his life. What kind of an example has he set his sons? He's only getting what he might have foreseen, reaping what he's sown."

"My chances of catching the fellows seem rather slight," mused Ted. "South America's a long way off and it's a mighty big place."

"It is," assented Mr. Hapworth. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"Haven't had time to figure it out yet," replied Ted. "Offhand, I shall send cablegrams to the consuls at the chief ports and ask them to notify me if they get any traces of the scamps. It's a scant chance, because they're probably traveling under assumed names. Some way or other, though, I'm determined to get on their track! They're as stupid as they are vicious, and probably they'll betray themselves," he proceeded. "Then, too, the money they've robbed their father of won't last forever, and probably they'll come sneaking back. Soon or late, I'll get my hands on them."

When Ted Scott returned to the Bromville House Eben was waiting for him in something of a flutter.

"There's a young lady waiting for you in

the parlor," he informed Ted. "Seems to be a foreigner of some kind. She doesn't speak English very well. Were you expectin' her?"

"Not the least in the world," replied Ted, in some surprise. "I wonder who on earth it can be."

He went into the parlor. A remarkably pretty girl, tastefully dressed, arose on his entrance.

"Good afternoon," said Ted. "I was told that you wanted to see me. I am Ted Scott."

"Oh, yes," said the girl, her smile revealing dazzling white teeth. "It ees Mistair Scott, the great aviator. I know your face, moi. I see you in Paris. I am Nina Monet."

"Miss Monet!" exclaimed Ted, in great surprise. "The niece of Mr. Paul Monet? I am delighted to meet you. I did not know that Mr. Monet had come back."

"Mon oncle, he ees not come back," replied the girl. "I come from the West Indies alone."

"But—but," stammered Ted, "I thought he was going to bring you to America in his airplane."

"So he tell me," replied Nina. "But I wait and wait and he not come. I theenk maybe he change hees mind, and as there be trouble with the overseer on the plantation—he insolent to moi—I get afraid to be there alone. So I leave

a lettair for mon oncle when he shall come there and I take steamer to Amerique."

Ted was considerably startled by this unexpected happening. The elation he had felt when he thought Paul Monet had returned was replaced by depression. He foresaw some awkward situations.

"I am delighted to see you," he said warmly, "and I am sorry that your uncle did not reach you before the trouble on the plantation. But no doubt he will be here soon. In the meantime, what are your plans? Where will you stay? Did you bring a lady companion with you?"

"Non," replied Nina. "I come alone, moi. Mon oncle in hees lettairs speak often of ze great Ted Scott and ze people he live weeth, ze Brownings. He say ze Madame Browning ees a lovely lady. I theenk I stay wiz her till mon oncle come back if she ees willing."

"Of course she will be willing," replied Ted, greatly relieved at this solution of the problem. "I'll take you to her right away."

Charity was more than willing to receive the stranger and took Nina to her heart at once. The motherless girl, on her part, recognized and appreciated the kindness and sincerity of "ze lovely lady."

Now, not only on his own account, but for the sake of Nina Monet also, Ted was exceedingly

anxious to have tidings of Monet and Tom Ralston. He knew that Paul Monet had intended to make his first stop at Nina's plantation, go on from there to the Island of the Cross of Palms, then return, pick the girl up and bring her back to America.

Figuring up the date on which Nina had left her home, Ted realized that Monet would have reached the plantation on his homeward trip long before if things had gone well with him. That he had not done so betokened disaster of some kind.

Mr. Hapworth shared Ted's premonitions.

"Looks bad," he said, shaking his head. "Something ought to be done to clear up the mystery."

"But what?" asked Ted. "I've cabled again to a dozen places without result. They seem to have vanished from the face of the earth."

Then one morning on opening his paper Ted Scott's eyes rested on the heading of a news dispatch:

"Wreckage of Plane Found Floating off the Cuban Coast!"

CHAPTER XI

In Search of the Flyers

A pang stabbed through Ted Scott's heart as he read the headlines in the newspaper.

Eagerly, he scanned the brief dispatch. It was disappointingly vague. A fishing vessel had come into Havana and reported having seen fragments of a broken airplane tossing in the waters off the southern coast. The waves were rough, and no attempt had been made to salvage the fragments. Looking at them through glasses, no name or other markings could be made out to indicate the identity of the plane.

The last sentence of the dispatch was ominous.

"The plane is said to have been blue in color."

Blue in color! The *Blue Gull!*

Ted's heart sank. Was this the end of Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston, two of his dearest

friends? Had they paid the penalty of daring?

Kindly, generous Paul Monet! Good, reliable Tom Ralston! What had been their fate? Had they been plunged beneath the waves of the Caribbean, their bodes doomed to be the prey of sharks? Or were they perhaps still alive, but marooned on some of the tiny islands of the archipelago, out of the track of ships, suffering perhaps from lack of food, predestined to starvation, dying of wounds incurred in the wreck of the plane?

Ted sought out Walter Hapworth and found him with a face as grave and a heart as sore as his own. He, too, had seen the dispatch and feared the worst.

"Caught in that hurricane probably while they were aloft," Mr. Hapworth observed. "No plane could live through it."

"The plane couldn't, but maybe the aviators did," returned Ted. "They may have been thrown into the water and afterward reached land. There's no end of small islands in those waters."

The two looked at each other and the same thought was in the mind of each.

"Walter," said Ted, "we've been pals in one flight over the sea. Are you willing to try it again?"

"Without doubt, I am," declared Mr. Hap-

worth, without a moment's hesitation. "Of course, what you are thinking of is to go in search of Paul and Tom. I'm with you from start to finish."

"Good!" cried Ted, extending his hand impulsively. "It's a bargain. Again you'll go as my navigator."

The two clasped hands warmly. They were under no delusions as to what the trip implied. They had nothing to gain for themselves and they might possibly lose their own lives. Certainly there would be hardship for them in so uncertain a search.

But they were made of brave, generous stuff, both of them, and they were willing to take the risk, if thereby succor could be brought to their missing friends.

"It's just what Mr. Monet and Tom would do for us, if the position were reversed," said Ted Scott. "I'd feel like a coward for the rest of my life, if I didn't do what I could."

"Well, now, as to ways and means! I suppose we'll go in the *Silver Streak?*" suggested Mr. Hapworth.

"Nothing else," agreed Ted. "There's no better plane in the world, and it's only a little while ago that I had her thoroughly overhauled so that there'll be very little tuning up to do. She carried us safely over the Pacific, and I'm sure she'll do the same over the West Indies."

"I'm confident she will," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "There's one big difference between the two trips, though. On the first we had a definite place in view and could lay our course direct for Honolulu. On this expedition we'll be looking for a needle in a haystack. We won't know where we're going, but we'll be on our way," he added, trying to throw some lightness into his tone.

"Something like that," replied Ted, smiling faintly. "On the other hand, we sha'n't have to go so far on a non-stop flight and we'll have plenty of places to land if we have to make repairs to the plane. And if we cross and criss-cross the islands often enough, it will be hard luck if we don't get some glimpse or some news of the men we're looking for, if they're still alive."

"If they're still alive," repeated Mr. Hapworth gravely. "That's the big 'if.' But whether we find them or not, we'll have at least the comfort of knowing that we did all we could."

"Of course," remarked Ted thoughtfully, "there's always the possibility that they may be turning up here any day, the very day after we start for that matter."

"True. I only hope they do. But, as you said, there are plenty of places to land in the West Indies. Every two or three days we'll

make a descent in some place from which we can cable home. Then if we learn that they've returned, we'll come back ourselves."

"And with good deal lighter hearts than we have now," added Ted. "Now that the thing's settled, the sooner we go the better. When can you start?"

"To-morrow. I'll have to send some telegrams relating to my business while I'm gone, but that will take me only an hour or two. The rest of the day I'll spend in getting all the supplies we'll need for the trip."

"That suits me," assented Ted. "While you're attending to the supplies, I'll go over the plane carefully and see that everything's in first-class shape. Then, too, I'll have to get in touch with Mr. Bruin over the long distance 'phone. It's only a matter of form, for he has a heart as big as a house and he won't put anything in my way when he knows my plan."

They separated on the spot, for time was precious, and Ted Scott went directly to the flying field where he set to work at once on the *Silver Streak.*

Mark Lawson came along while he was at work and stopped for a chat.

"Had a hurry call for something?" he asked, as he saw the feverish activity with which Ted was working on the plane.

"Yes, you're right," replied Ted, without suspending his task for a moment.

"Starting on another ocean trip?" asked Mark. "I suppose," he added, with a grin, "that it will be the Indian Ocean this time, as you've already crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific."

"Nothing like that," said Ted. "A little private trip that's got to be done in a hurry."

"Been thrashing any more loafers since I saw you last?" went on Mark. "Taking on two at a time just to keep you in exercise?"

Ted laughed and shook his head.

"By the way, Greg and Duck are keeping pretty much to themselves these days," remarked Mark. "Haven't seen them for a dog's age. Guess they're ashamed to show their faces after the licking you gave them."

"I understand they've left town," replied Ted.

"What?" asked Mark in surprise. "Well, if that's so it's a mighty good thing for the town. They've disgraced it for years. Where have they gone?"

"I don't know," answered Ted. "Say, Mark," he added, as a thought struck him, "will you do me a favor?"

"Surest thing you know," replied Mark promptly. "There's nothing you can ask that I won't do if it's possible."

"Thanks, old boy," replied Ted. "I'm frightfully busy, as you see, or I wouldn't trouble you. I'd like to have you scout about town to-night if you can and see if you can learn where Greg and Duck have gone. You know the places they used to hang out, poolrooms and tough joints. Maybe their pals will know something about their plans and be willing to loosen up. If you need to slip them a little something for the information, I'll make it all right with you before I leave to-morrow."

"That's easy," assented Mark. "I'll do all I can."

The thought had come to Ted Scott that the West Indies were on the route to South America and that, if the rascals were really bound for that continent, they might possibly have stopped off at some of the seaport towns of the archipelago. If so, he might be able to kill two birds with one stone.

Reaching home, Ted's first act was to call up Mr. Bruin on the long distance 'phone. Luckily, he got a quick connection and reached his employer in his office.

Ted explained the urgent reasons for the trip he had in view, and had no difficulty in having his leave of absence extended for as long as might prove necessary. Tom Ralston had once been in Mr. Bruin's employ, and the president of the company had a sincere liking for

him. He was deeply concerned at Tom's possible plight and wished Ted all the luck in the world on his expedition.

"So that's settled," said Ted to himself, with deep satisfaction as he hung up the 'phone.

He went in to dinner in the little private room, apart from the regular dining room, where the family took their meals. Eben, Charity, and Nina were already at the table. Ted noticed with a start that Nina's eyes were red from weeping.

Charity noted Ted's glance and said quietly:

"Poor Nina has had bad news."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Ted, in a tone of such sympathy that Nina's tears started afresh.

"I've been telling her," said Eben, as he carved a joint, "that perhaps she's borrowing trouble. You can't believe all that you see in the papers."

"In the papers!" exclaimed Ted, as his mind reverted to the item he had seen that morning. Had Nina seen that? He had meant to keep it from her if he could.

"Yes, Mistair Scott," put in Nina. "Le journal eet say that a plane, a blue plane, eet have been seen floating in l'eaux near ze isle of Cuba. Eet must be ze plane of mon pauvre oncle. He ees killed. Il est mort!"

"Now, don't worry over that the least little bit," said Ted heartily. "There are many blue

planes, and this plane might have been any one of a hundred. It doesn't mean a thing. You dry your eyes now and forget about it."

"But why he stay so long?" wailed Nina. "Oh, I know, moi. Sometheeng has happened. He would not stay away if theengs were well. He ees hurt or he ees lost or he ees dead. I must go back to ze islands and look for heem."

"You mustn't do that," said Ted.

"But I must," persisted Nina. "I cannot eat. I cannot sleep until I know."

"You shall know," promised Ted Scott.

"But how?" asked Nina.

"Because I'll find out for you. I'm to start for the West Indies to-morrow to look for him."

Eben dropped his knife and fork. Charity gave a start and turned pale. Nina stared at Ted open-eyed.

CHAPTER XII

The Clinging Fog

If a bombshell had exploded in that quiet dining room, its occupants could scarcely have been more startled.

"Made up your mind rather suddenly, haven't you?" asked Eben, as he pulled himself together.

"Since I left you this morning," answered Ted. "I saw Mr. Hapworth, and he agreed with me that it was the only thing for us to do. Mr. Monet is a close friend of his, and of mine, too, and I'm very fond of Tom Ralston. We've got to find out what's become of them!"

"Oh, you are so brave, so good, so generous!" cried Nina, her eyes shining like stars. "You will look for mon oncle! You will save heem! Oh, I will pray for you to le bon Dieu!"

"I will do my best to find him or get news of him," promised Ted.

He went over to Charity's chair and bent over her fondly.

"You must not worry, Mother," he said gently. "You are well now, and you must see that it is my duty to go. I have gone on more dangerous trips and come back safely. Then I was doing it for fame and glory. Now I am doing it for my friends. You wouldn't put anything in my way, would you?"

Charity looked him in the eyes.

"No, my dear boy," she said, returning his caress. "I shall miss you dreadfully, but I think you're doing the Lord's will. He is the Lord of the sky as well as the earth. I will pray for you night and day until you get back."

"I know you will, Mother," replied Ted, hugging her closely. "Often when I've been in danger and pulled through I've known that you were praying for me. I'll be very careful, and I expect to be back in a few weeks. A few days, perhaps, for Mr. Monet and Tom may come back any minute, and as soon as we learn they have we'll come straight back. And you'll have Nina with you now for company."

"I know," said Charity, looking fondly at the girl. "She's already endeared herself to me."

There were many last-minute things to be done, and Ted worked far into the night. Mr. Hapworth was equally busy. Neither sought sleep until the last item of the supplies was

on board of the plane, ready for an early start in the morning.

There was a tender leave-taking from the old folks, after an early breakfast the next day, and Nina Monet's protestations of gratitude and admiration were still ringing in Ted's ears as he made his way to the air field where the *Silver Streak,* burnished and polished and tuned to the minute, lay sparkling in the first rays of the morning sun.

"Isn't she a beauty?" exclaimed Ted, as he caressed the beautiful machine that seemed to him like a breathing thing.

"She's all of that," agreed Mr. Hapworth.

Mark Lawson was on hand as he had promised.

"Any luck, old boy?" asked Ted, as he shook his friend's extended hand.

"Nothing very definite, though it wasn't for want of trying," replied Mark. "I was in more tough joints last night than I thought existed in the town. And, believe me, the kind of fellows those Gale twins ran with would astonish you, even knowing Greg and Duck. Touts, poolroom sharks, gamblers, the very scum of creation."

"I see," mused Ted. "Was anything said about their stopping off at the West Indies?"

"Not a thing," replied Mark. "Why, have you any idea they're bound for there?"

"No," said Ted. "I asked simply because that wasn't far off the direct route to South America. Well, thanks very much, Mark. Did you have to spend any money in getting the information?"

"Not a nickel in cash," answered Mark. "A few cigars passed around did the trick. Wish I could have gotten you some news worth while."

"You may yet," replied Ted. "I'm going on a trip that will probably not take me more than two or three weeks. By a month, at latest, I'm almost sure to be back. If you'll just keep your eyes and ears open for anything that concerns the whereabouts of those two rascals and let me know when I get home, I'll be eternally obliged to you."

"You can count on me," promised Mark. "Gee, but you've got a lot of supplies in this plane! Rifles, too! Looks as though you expected trouble."

"Just a little bit of precaution," replied Ted. "We probably sha'n't have to use them, but it's just as well to be prepared. So long, old boy."

"Good-by and the best of luck," said Mark. "Give the word when you're ready and I'll knock the blocks away."

Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth, pilot and navigator of the *Silver Streak,* climbed into

the machine and adjusted their straps. Ted gave the signal, the engine roared, and the *Silver Streak* whizzed along the runway for a few hundred yards and mounted into the air. Ted turned her nose toward the south and the momentous journey was begun.

A wave of exhilaration swept over Ted Scott as the gallant plane struck her gait and shot through the ether. The suspense and restlessness of the last few weeks vanished. Now he had action instead of worry. He was fairly embarked on a great adventure, and every hour was bringing him a hundred miles nearer to the solution of a mystery.

That is, if it was possible of solution. It might be one of the countless tragedies that are buried in eternal silence. But Ted resolutely put that thought out of his mind.

In one way the trip differed from any other in his experience. Always before this he had had a definite goal, and he had shot toward it like an arrow toward its mark. But now he had a strange sense of being adrift, blindfolded. He had nothing definite to aim at.

The West Indies! An archipelago that, with the waters that surrounded or were contiguous to it, covered thousands of square miles equivalent almost to a continent. Some great islands, but hundreds of smaller ones, some of them mere rocks rising from the water or sand spits

or coral reefs that a man could almost jump across, dotting the surging wastes of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

Many of them would probably elude his vigilance altogether. Others, as he passed over them, would be obscured by fog or mist. And any of these might be the very one that he wanted to discover most of all, the one perhaps on which his missing friends were marooned.

He was heading straight toward the Gulf of Mexico, and he planned to make his first stop at Havana. There he would investigate all the circumstances attending the sighting of the wrecked floating plane. From then on he would be guided by what might seem best at the moment.

He would endeavor to find the Island of the Cross of Palms. It was possible that Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston had really reached the goal of their journey and had been detained there by circumstances beyond their control.

Ted refused to let himself believe that the devilfish had been one of those "circumstances." The thought was too grisly for contemplation!

Up to three o'clock that afternoon the weather was all that could be desired. Visibility was good, and the hills and valleys, plains and woodlands, lakes and rivers unrolled beneath them like an endless ribbon.

After that hour, however, the sky darkened and the weather thickened. Beginning with a slight haze, the atmosphere was soon surcharged with moisture, and an hour later a dense, dank fog closed in upon the plane, so that Ted had to steer entirely by his instruments.

But this did not cause him much apprehension, for he had his trusty earth inductor compass, which had stood him in such good stead in his flights across the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Still, a fog was something always to be reckoned with by an aviator. Death, in the shape of another plane winging itself straight toward him, was always a possibility. Moreover, it lessened the chances of making a landing, if anything should go wrong with the plane.

Ted redoubled his vigilance and reduced his speed, hoping that at any moment the fog would lift.

Instead, it grew ever thicker and clammier. Ted could not see ten feet ahead of him. Beads of water formed and dropped from his helmet. The stick grew slippery in his grasp.

He had been flying at a height of about three thousand feet. He pushed the stick forward and the plane nosed its way downward in the hope of finding better visibility on a lower strata. But it grew thicker rather than clearer

as he descended, and he checked the plunge when he had come within a thousand feet of the earth.

There was nothing to be looked for in that direction. He pulled back the stick and the *Silver Streak* shot upward. At five thousand feet there was but little change. That little, however, was encouraging, and Ted kept on with the ascent.

Then, when he had reached nine thousand feet, he suddenly emerged into the full, glorious light of the sun. He could have shouted with relief.

Sailing above the fog bank, the sight presented below was beautiful beyond description. The sun's rays shining upon the billows of fog turned them into waves of silver fleece. The undulations of the banks were like the billows of the sea. It was a sight granted to few mortals, and once seen could never be forgotten.

But the young aviator could not dwell long on the amazing beauty of the scene. A more practical need pressed upon him. It was a chance to take observations of the sun and thus check up on the correctness of his instruments.

The roar of the engine made it difficult to hold speech with Mr. Hapworth, but Ted scribbled a line on a bit of paper and shoved it through the tube that connected him with his navigator.

"A good chance to check up," the note suggested.

Walter Hapworth set to work at once with his instruments, and in a few minutes sent his figures through the tube to Ted. The latter compared them with his own estimates and found that they almost exactly tallied.

"Score one more for the inductor compass," he murmured to himself.

A few minutes later a speck appeared on the horizon in front of him, which rapidly resolved itself into a biplane coming in his direction with double the speed of an express train.

The newcomer was traveling on about the same level as Ted, and the latter rose to avoid him. To his surprise the stranger did the same.

Ted pushed his stick and went lower. So did the other!

Ted Scott's surprise gave way to consternation. Was he dealing with a maniac of the skies?

CHAPTER XIII

A Close Call

The situation was menacing, the more so as the two planes were now within a few hundred yards of each other.

Once more Ted Scott darted upward, only to be followed by the other in a similar movement. It was as though a state of warfare existed and the oncoming plane was seeking to close with the enemy.

A collision seemed inevitable until, just as the planes were a stone's throw apart, Ted made a dexterous side slip that just carried him past the other by so close a margin that the two planes almost touched.

The young flyer found himself drenched with sweat created by the awful strain and horror of those last few minutes. He glanced behind him to see the strange plane roaring away in the distance.

His mind was in a bewildered state. What was the explanation of such an unheard-of occurrence?

Had the similarity of movement occurred only once, it might have been explainable on the analogy of two men passing each other in the street and each turning to right or left at the same time to find themselves still facing each other.

But in each case in this instance, when Ted Scott had gone up or down he had preceded the other by time enough to let the stranger know what he intended doing and govern himself accordingly.

A note came through the tube from Mr. Hapworth. Ted opened the bit of paper and read:

"I thought we were doomed, Ted. What do you think made the fool act that way?"

Ted wrote in return:

"Can't say. He must have been sick or drunk or crazy. I don't know whether he wanted to commit murder or suicide."

Suicide it would certainly have been; for both planes, in the event of a collision, would have crumpled up like paper and gone whirling through space to the ground below.

The more Ted Scott thought of it the more inclined he was to the conclusion that the strange aviator's mind had been in a temporary daze and that he had automatically followed Ted's movements without a clear consciousness of what he was doing. Such things, he knew,

had occurred at times, though fortunately they were rare.

Night came on, a beautiful night when the darkness was like soft velvet upon which the stars were spread out like jewels. He knew both from his instruments and the change in the atmosphere that he had left the land and was flying over the water.

The lights of villages and cities had given place to the occasional gleam that came from the lights of steamers plying in the Gulf of Mexico.

The wind was light and what there was favored the plane, as it came almost directly from the rear, and under the additional impetus thus gained the *Silver Streak* fairly ate up the miles that intervened between the American coast and its destination.

So rapid was her gait indeed that she was hovering over Havana while it was still dark, and Ted had to circle above the sleeping city until dawn should reveal a safe place for landing.

As soon as it was light enough to see, he located the flying field in the outskirts of the city and brought the plane down to a perfect landing.

Ted sought out the officer in charge of the field and made arrangements for the care and storage of his plane. Then he and Mr. Hap-

worth took a conveyance to the leading hotel and tumbled into their beds to get the rest they so sorely needed.

They rose about noon, and after a bath and dinner, repaired to the offices of the two leading newspapers of the city. There they were courteously received and given all the information the papers possessed regarding the wrecked plane.

Unfortunately, this was little more than that already contained in the news dispatch that had come to the attention of Mr. Monet's friends. No other vessel had sighted the fragments of the plane nor, as far as was known, had they been washed ashore. Nor was there news of any subsequent plane accident that might relate to the Monet expedition.

One other bit of information Ted sought to gather. Did any of the newspaper men know, he asked, the location of an island that had as its distinguishing feature two lines of palm trees crossing each other at right angles, thus forming a cross?

All looked blank at the question. None of them had ever heard of such an island. Furthermore, doubt was expressed that, even if there had been such a place, the trees would still be standing, for the hurricane that had swept over the archipelago had leveled thou-

sands of trees—a thought that had already occurred to Ted.

"Haven't scored anything yet," remarked the young aviator, as he and Mr. Hapworth left the office of the second newspaper. "Let's go to the American consul and see if he can do anything for us."

That gentleman was extremely busy at the time, but his rather indifferent expression gave way to one of the keenest interest, almost excitement, the moment he heard Ted Scott's name.

"Is it possible that you are the Mr. Scott who flew over the Atlantic?" he asked.

Ted smilingly admitted the fact.

The consul was considerably fluttered.

"This is indeed an honor as great as it is unexpected," he affirmed. "The city will be delighted to pay you tribute. I will give a dinner followed by a reception, and all the dignitaries of the island will be proud to attend."

"Thank you very much," replied Ted. "But I am here on a strictly private errand and I want to keep my presence secret, as publicity would seriously upset my plans. I must ask you as a favor not to mention my name or my visit to the newspapers or to any one."

The consul looked disappointed.

"That's too bad," he said. "But of course

your wishes are my commands. Tell me what I can do to serve you, and I will put all the resources of my office at your disposal."

"That's very good of you," replied Ted. "The fact is that a dear friend of mine, whose name and mission I am under pledge not to reveal, recently started from the United States to make a tour of the West Indies in an airplane. His long absence has made my friend, Mr. Hapworth, and me very uneasy. That uneasiness was increased when we saw a dispatch from a Havana paper saying that the wreck of an airplane, blue in color, like my friend's, had been found floating in the waters off the southern coast of Cuba. We feared it might be his. Do you know any more about it than was contained in the dispatch?"

The consul reflected a moment and then shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "Nothing more on that subject has come to my attention. I saw the item to which you refer, but as there was nothing to indicate that the plane had belonged to a countryman of ours, I gave it little more thought. I did cable the matter to Washington on a chance that one of the army or navy planes might have been in the vicinity, but learned in return that all were accounted for. That left nothing more for me to do. Was your friend a skilled aviator?"

"The owner of the plane was only a fair amateur flyer; but his pilot was one of the best men that ever touched a joy stick. No ordinary trouble would find him unable to cope with it."

"Then you must not give up hope," the consul said. "There are so many islands in this archipelago, some of which are seldom or never visited by ships, that they might be on any one of them for a long time without getting in touch with civilization. I sincerely hope you may find them alive and well."

To the consul Ted repeated his question about the location of the island with the trees in the form of a cross. Here again he ran up against a blank wall.

"Well," said Ted to Mr. Hapworth, after they had taken their leave of the American representative, "we know no more than when we started."

"True," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "But we've reached Cuba and cleared the decks for action. Now we can devote ourselves to the one object of finding Paul Monet and his pilot."

It was too late to start on the search that day, but enough time yet remained for them to go out to the flying field, overhaul and refuel the plane, and make all preparations for an early start on the morrow.

They retired early and were up at the first

streak of dawn, with the intention of cruising that day between Cuba and Porto Rico.

There was not a cloud in the sky and hardly a breath of wind stirring when Ted Scott lifted the *Silver Streak* into the air.

Both Ted and his navigator were provided with a pair of powerful glasses, and all through the morning they scanned every part of the tossing waters beneath them. Every small island and spit of land was subjected to the same keen inspection, but without avail.

It was nearing noon when the crack of rifles came to their ears.

They had noticed two schooners not far from each other, but had given them only a passing glance.

Now, as the reports of guns startled them, they looked again and saw that the vessels had come together and were held close by grappling irons while the swarming decks showed men in desperate combat.

A battle was on!

CHAPTER XIV

A Desperate Combat

Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth could hardly believe their eyes as they gazed in fascinated horror at the struggle going on below.

Ted pushed the stick forward and the *Silver Streak* nosed her way down until she was not more than two hundred feet above the vessels.

The rattle of rifles and revolvers was now almost incessant, and with it were blended the raucous shouts of the fighters as they alternately advanced and retreated. Some of the battlers were fighting hand to hand, and knives gleamed in the sun.

Now and again men were seen to fall, and within a few minutes half a dozen bodies of dead or wounded cluttered the deck.

Finally one side seemed to gain a decided advantage. They drove their opponents into a corner of the deck, and these few survivors at last held up their hands in token of surrender.

Their hands were tied and they were herded into the hold or the cabin. Then the victors

set to work to clear the decks of the prostrate bodies. All were thrown into the water, dead and wounded alike, with the exception of two who probably belonged to the party of the victors.

It was bloody work, cruel work, and the hearts of the aviators were stirred to wrath and disgust.

But there was nothing that they could do against such numerous adversaries. Besides, they did not know which had been in the right, if either. But they had a strong conviction that they had witnessed a fight between two reckless gangs one of which was as bad as the other.

In the excitement of the battle the approach of the plane had not been noticed, or, if it had been, had been disregarded.

But now the victors were seen to look upward and talk excitedly to each other. They were evidently uneasy and angry at the presence of witnesses, who, if they could make out the names of the vessels, might report the matter to the authorities.

An order was given and a shot rang out. The next second a bullet pierced the right wing of the plane. Like a flash, Ted pulled the stick and the plane shot upward, but not before another bullet had buried itself in the fuselage.

Still other shots followed, but they fell short,

and a moment later the plane was out of range at the height of a thousand feet.

Only then did the two aviators breathe freely. In what were supposed to be times of peace they had come very close to violent death!

The men on the vessels were working with frantic haste. At any moment a gunboat might come in sight and gather them in. Some of the triumphant party poured back over the side into their original craft while others remained to navigate the prize. The grappling hooks were cast off, the vessels drifted apart, yards were squared, and in a few minutes they were careening in different directions with all sails set.

The hole in the wing of the plane and the unknown damage that might have been done by the bullet that struck the fuselage made it advisable to seek an immediate landing for repairs.

Ted had just set the nose of the plane toward a small island that lay a few miles away to the eastward when a note from Mr. Hapworth came through the tube:

"Think I see a man trying to keep afloat in the water. Look straight down and see if I'm right."

Ted seized his glasses and directed his gaze downward. His vision was extraordinarily

keen, and he was sure that Mr. Hapworth's conjecture was correct.

He pushed the stick and swept downward, and soon belief became certainty.

A man's head was visible above the crest of the waves, and as Ted came closer he could make out spasmodic movements of the arms and legs.

He hastily scribbled a note to Hapworth:

"Unwind that coil of rope and stand by. I'll get down as close as I can and you let the rope down. Tie a loop in the end of it."

Mr. Hapworth did as directed, and when the young air pilot raised his arm as a signal, threw the rope over.

Even as it fell, Ted Scott detected an ominous black fin cutting through the water and making straight for the wounded man.

He grabbed his rifle and fired at the horrid shape. Mr. Hapworth's rifle cracked almost at the same instant.

There was a momentary checking of the monster's speed that indicated it had been struck. But if so, the wound was not mortal, for again it resumed its rush.

The rope was dangling now within a few feet of the man, and he made a desperate lunge at it, but missed.

Then an awful scream came from his lips and he disappeared. The water became of a

ruddy hue. The pirate of the sea had grasped its prey!

The *Silver Streak* hovered over the water a few minutes longer, though Ted knew this was useless. Then, with his heart throbbing with sympathy and pain, the young aviator lifted the plane again into the upper air and sped toward the island he had discerned.

There was no sign of human habitation here. The island was a small one, not more than a couple of miles in length and half as much in width. There was a luxuriant growth of vegetation in the interior, but near the edge was a broad sandy beach that seemed to offer a suitable spot for landing.

Ted scanned it narrowly and then descended, landing with scarcely a jar.

He and Mr. Hapworth jumped from the plane and faced each other. Their pent up emotions at last found vent in speech.

"Who were those fellows and what were they fighting about, do you suppose?" asked Ted Scott, throwing himself down on the beach.

"Rum runners and hijackers would be my guess," replied Walter Hapworth. "The hijackers had probably learned that the vessel they attacked had a cargo of liquor on board and they made up their minds they wanted it, and they got it."

"At the cost of half a dozen lives or so," added Ted.

"Those fellows would take a life as unconcernedly as they'd strike a match," observed Mr. Hapworth. "They're as bad as the pirates of the olden time. They're the offscourings of the earth."

"But to throw the wounded over with the dead argues the ferocity of wild beasts!" said Ted, with a shudder. "They might at least have cared for their wounds and put them ashore somewhere."

"Dead men tell no tales," replied Hapworth. "That was the rule in the Spanish Main at the time of the old buccaneers. The bones of thousands of murdered men lie beneath these waves. It's the most tragic sea in the world. I do wish we'd been able to save that poor swimmer. We came within an ace of doing it, at that. But the shark was quicker."

They rested for a while and then set to work on the plane. Luckily, neither of the shots had done any great damage and the repairs were quickly made.

They had brought plentiful food supplies with them, and it was a relief to be able to eat at their leisure without having to resort to hasty bites while navigating the plane.

The beach was scorchingly hot under the rays of the semitropical sun, and they looked

about for shelter. At a little distance inland was an inviting spot rich in vegetation and shaded by waving palms.

There they made an excellent meal and afterward reclined on the turf for a little space before resuming their flight.

They had brought their rifles with them, not from any apprehension of danger in that uninhabited spot, but because it was a wholesome habit that might at any time stand them in stead.

Ted was facing the bushes while Mr. Hapworth was reclining with his back toward them. Ted was in the midst of a sentence when he paused abruptly.

"Go on, old man," said Hapworth lazily. "What's stopping you?"'

"Walter," said Ted in a low tone that he tried to keep steady, "can you keep perfectly still? Not move a muscle?"

Walter Hapworth's face grew white under its tan, but he kept his nerve.

"Yes," he murmured.

"Do it," counseled Ted, as his hand moved slowly toward his rifle.

CHAPTER XV

Writhing Coils

There was ample reason why Walter Hapworth, if he wanted to live, should be as motionless as a stone image. Not five feet away from him, a wicked, malignant head, with eyes that seemed to glow like sparks of fire, upreared itself above a mass of yellowish coils.

Ted Scott had known at a glance what it was, a fer-de-lance, that dreaded snake of the West Indies whose bite is death, and death that comes almost as quickly as that caused by a bolt of lightning.

Ted had detected a movement in the grass and an instant later had seen that deadly head upraised. His first impulse had been to shout an alarm and spring to his feet.

Had he yielded to that impulse, Walter Hapworth's fate would have been sealed, for the fer-de-lance, unlike the rattlesnake that strikes at only its own length, is a leaping snake capable of clearing seven feet at a spring. The

least movement of Walter Hapworth, and those deadly fangs would have been imbedded in his flesh.

That hideous head kept weaving about, eying first Ted Scott and then the immobile form of Mr. Hapworth. Was the latter the figure of a living thing? If not, it would disdain to waste its venom.

Inch by inch, Ted's hand moved toward the rifle. The movement was so slow and gentle that it escaped suspicion on the part of the reptile, which was now steadily eying Mr. Hapworth.

Ted's fingers clutched the butt of the rifle, and with the same almost imperceptible movement raised it to his shoulder.

Bang! The report rang out and the bullet entered the thick body of the reptile just below the throat.

There was a terrible hissing and thrashing about as the creature writhed in the throes of death.

At the instant that Ted shot, Mr. Hapworth leaped to his feet and ran in the direction of his own rifle.

But there was no need of another bullet. The first had done its work. The snake floundered about a few moments longer and then the coils straightened out and it lay limp.

"Great shooting, Ted," observed Mr. Hap-

worth, in a voice that was husky from the terrible strain he had been under.

"And great nerve on your part, Walter," responded Ted admiringly. "The slightest movement, and the snake would have been upon you. I take off my hat to you. Did you know what it was that was behind you?"

"I guessed pretty well," replied Mr. Hapworth, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "I knew from the look in your eyes that it was something deadly, and my thoughts leaped at once to a fer-de-lance. And that's a synonym for death! And such a death!" He shuddered.

"Well, he won't do any more killing," observed Ted. "Let's take a look at him."

With the utmost caution and holding their rifles ready, they approached their enemy. But the precaution was needless. There was no movement in the snake except a slight quivering in the tail that they knew was due to muscular reflexes. The eyes were already glazing, although, to Ted's fancy, even in death they retained some of their malignity.

"Gee, but he's a big fellow!" commented Ted, as with the butt of his gun he straightened the reptile to its full length. "Six feet if he's an inch, and fairly dripping with poison."

"He'd never have had to repeat his stroke,

you're right. Look at that spike at the end of the tail."

"Yes," replied Ted. "It's that that gives them their purchase when they make their leap."

"About the deadliest snake in the world, I guess. I remember hearing once of four British sailors ashore on leave who thought it would be a lark to climb up a steep path that led to the top of a cliff. Their companions, watching them, saw one of them fall as though he had been shot. A moment later another went down. The others disappeared in turn. A searching party, heavily armed, went up and found that all four had fallen victims to the fer-de-lance. All were dead when they were found, just as I'd have been by this time, if you hadn't shot straight, Ted."

"It's a good thing we had our rifles," replied Ted. "I guess we'd better make tracks for the beach. Those snakes usually travel in pairs, and this fellow's mate may be around somewhere."

They suited the action to the word, and felt better when they had left the shadow of the woods behind them.

The beach had been beaten by the waves until it was almost as smooth and hard as marble and afforded an excellent runway for the *Silver Streak,* which took off like a bird.

All that afternoon they flew along the southern coast of Cuba, covering several hundred miles in their search for the lost flyers. But again no success rewarded their efforts. Again and again they descended toward the surface when any floating object attracted their attention, but what they thought, yet feared, might be a plane proved to be driftwood or some flotsam or jetsam of the sea.

As the day waned, they made for the city of Santiago de Cuba, where they planned to spend the night.

Their hearts thrilled with patriotic pride as they hovered over the historic harbor, for it was here, in the Spanish-American war, that Lieutenant Hobson had sunk the Merrimac in the harbor in a gallant though futile effort to block up the Spanish fleet, and it was off this coast when Cervera's fleet had made its dash for the open sea that it had been shattered by the vessels of Sampson and Schley.

The aviators made their landing in a flying field on the outskirts of the city, and after making provision for the care of their plane sought out a good hotel and had a bath and dinner. Then, because time was pressing and they did not wish to lose a day, they called upon the American consul to repeat their inquiries about Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston. They asked for news also of Greg and Duck

Gale, on the chance that the rascals might have stopped off at the town.

The consul was cordial, but could give them no information. They did not prolong their call, but hastened at once to the waterfront, where they pursued their inquiries among officers of vessels and members of their crews.

After perhaps an hour of fruitless effort they chanced upon a grizzled old sailor who was tranquilly smoking his pipe as he half sat, half lay, upon a bale of goods on a wharf.

"An airplane?" he drawled, as he slowly drew his pipe from his mouth and scrutinized the two airmen. "Well, yes, I did get a squint at somethin' that looked like that two days ago when we was beatin' up this way. Leastways, I said it was an airplane, but Jess Jenkins said I was cockeyed an' I told him he was a—"

"Where was this?" interrupted Ted eagerly.

"Off the Caicos Islands, the North Caicos, if I remember aright," was the reply. "You see, I was on watch an' I seen this bit o' wreckage bobbin' up an' down about a mile, or maybe a little less, to leeward, an' I says to Jess—him sharin' the same watch with me—'Jess', I says, 'pipe your glims on that blue thing there,' I says—"

"Blue?" exclaimed the two aviators in the same breath.

"That's the way it looked to me," was the reply, "though what with the sun shinin' an' the water changin' color an' all, I wouldn't be noways sure. An' Jess he spits an' says to me, 'Jack,' he says,—my moniker is Jack Thompson—'Jack,' says he, 'you want to get a new pair of glims. There ain't nothin' there. You ain't got over the drink last night an' you're seein' things that ain't so,' he says, an' then we had a bit of argument, kind o' heated like, an' when I looked again the thing was out of sight. But I knows what I seen an' it was an airplane of some kind, an' I says to myself, 'there's some poor air sailor that now is meat for the sharks an'—'"

"Yes," put in Ted, for he saw that the old salt was wound up to run indefinitely. "You say that you were off the Caicos when you saw this thing drifting?"

"Nearer North Caicos than any other of them islands," affirmed Thompson. "Course, it may not be there now 'cause it may have sunk or been carried a long way off by the currents, which run mighty strong about there—"

"I see," interrupted Ted. "Much obliged for the information," and he slipped the man a five dollar bill.

Thompson's eyes bulged.

"You sure are a gent of the right kind," he

said, as he pocketed the money. "Thank'ee kindly, sir."

"What do you think of it?" asked Ted as he and Mr. Hapworth walked slowly toward their hotel.

"Rather hazy, but worth looking into," responded his friend. "We're desperately in need of clues, and we can't afford to overlook any, no matter how slight."

The next morning they soared off in the direction of the Caicos, a group of islands geographically part of the Bahamas, though politically a dependency of Jamaica.

Search in the vicinity of North Caicos revealed nothing, although they circled the surrounding waters several times, carefully scrutinizing anything that broke the surface of the waters. Getting no result there, they sailed above the other islands of the group with the same depressing lack of discovery. All that day they hunted, for they were loath to give up the only apparent clue they had yet stumbled upon.

"I guess Jess was right when he said that Jack was cockeyed," remarked Walter Hapworth that night, after they had landed.

"Either that or the wreckage had broken up and drifted away in fragments," returned Ted. "Yet we ought to be glad instead of sorry. For if we had found what we were look-

ing for, it would probably have meant that Mr. Monet and Tom had perished. It's a case where no news—of this special kind—is good news."

A full week went by with similar diligent efforts and similar lack of results. No wreckage of an airplane came in sight. No island or cay or rock or sandspit or coral reef indicated the presence of the missing ones. No man—and they interviewed scores of them—had heard or seen anything of the *Blue Gull* or its occupants. It was as though they had melted into thin air.

If it had not been for the distressed and preoccupied condition of the minds of the searchers, they would have found plenty of things to awaken and hold their fascinated interest; for if Hawaii is the Paradise of the Pacific, the West Indies is the Paradise of the Caribbean. Hardly anywhere else on earth has nature been so prodigal and kind. Smiling skies, fruitful earth, and cerulean seas make a picture that flames with color and dazzles by its beauty.

Then, too, there is hardly a square acre that does not have some historic interest attached to it. Here the proud galleons of Spain took the gold of the New World to the treasuries of the Old. Here Sir Francis Drake scoured the seas and "singed the whiskers of the King of

Spain." Here the buccaneers boarded ships and stormed cities. Here the French and English fleets battled for supremacy. Here Columbus in his caravels caught his first glimpse of the New World.

But all these things, passing like a panorama before the eyes and minds of Mr. Hapworth and Ted Scott made little impression at the time. The nature of their quest and its extreme urgency absorbed them to the exclusion of everything else.

They had experienced thus far ideal flying conditions. Scarcely a cloud dimmed the azure of the skies. The winds were just brisk enough to afford a grateful relief from the scorching rays of the sun. The *Silver Streak* was performing beautifully, as though she, too, were alive to the importance of her mission.

One day, however, shortly after they had taken off, there came a change. The sunset the night before had been lurid—in itself a matter of sinister significance. The cirrus clouds were plumed and feathery, indicating wind. Gradually they were merged into more sombre shades. A drizzling rain had commenced to fall and this gradually increased in volume. The wind began to moan and the barometer to fall.

Had the adventurers been more familiar with West Indian weather signs, they would have

known that what the Carib Indians called a "huracan" was coming.

How that dreaded huracan—from which has come our hurricane—originates is still unknown to science. As good a theory as any, perhaps, is that in some restricted area a little south of the limit of the northeast trade winds a certain section of the air grows warmer and more moist than the air that surrounds it. This makes it more buoyant than that outside of its circumference and it rises and starts circulating in a vertical direction—an "air spout" somewhat similar to the water spout at sea.

The gathering darkness and the rising wind made Ted uneasy. Had he been anywhere near land, he would have come down and waited until the gale had blown over. But he was over a wide waste of waters without any land in sight, and he spurred the *Silver Streak* into full speed, anxiously looking for solid ground. The search became more difficult as the darkness deepened.

The moaning of the wind now developed into a shriek. The rain came down more heavily. Through the haze that had started to gather beneath the plane the water itself could only be dimly seen.

A darker blur loomed in the vista before him, and the young aviator's pulses quickened with

the hope that it was land. He snatched his glasses and strained his eyes.

He had not been mistaken. Below him was a small island, its outlines dimly discernible in the deepening haze. Ted could see the spume of the breakers as they dashed on the rocky coast.

Then suddenly a cry broke from Ted's lips and in his agitation he dropped the glasses. He picked them up again from the floor of the fuselage and again bent his gaze on the land below.

There in the center of the island were two rows of palm trees crossing each other at right angles, forming the figure of a cross!

CHAPTER XVI

The Hurricane Strikes

For a moment Ted Scott's heart seemed as though it would leap out of his body. This was—it must be—the Island of the Cross of Palms!

Ted was conscious of a grasp on his shoulder and, turning his head, saw Mr. Hapworth pointing excitedly to the ground below. He, too, had seen those crossing trees.

Ted nodded his head and immediately checked the speed of the plane and began circling about, looking for a possible landing.

Just then, without further warning, the hurricane struck!

It caught the plane in the rear and whirled it along like a feather. At the same time the rain came down in torrents, and blackness that could almost be felt shut out all sight of the land below.

The roar of the wind was like that of wild beasts, and now the thunder joined in and added to the deafening clamor of the elements.

Around and around the plane whirled in the wind that seemed to come from all quarters at once. There was no stemming it, nothing to do save to try to keep the plane on an even keel and let the wind take it where it would.

The material of which the *Silver Streak* was made and the special care that had been given to its construction now proved the salvation of its occupants. The ordinary plane would have been dismembered, torn to pieces in a twinkling. But every part of the *Silver Streak* had been fashioned with extreme care with the special purpose in view of crossing the Pacific. The vulnerable parts had been doubly, in some cases trebly, reinforced. It was the last word in airplane construction.

Even then, however, it might not have survived the hurricane if it had not been for the superb craftsmanship of the pilot. Ted Scott was ever at his best in times of stress. Now in this tremendous uproar he kept his head. His nerves were like steel.

It was utterly impossible to guide the plane in any given direction. But what the pilot could do and what he did do was to take advantage of every momentary lull in the tempest, to sense the quarter from which the next gust would come, and so manœuvre that the strongest part of the plane should bear the brunt of the onset. It was a fight of the human

brain against the unchained fury of the elements, and though the struggle seemed unequal there never was a moment that Ted Scott permitted himself to believe that it was hopeless.

For hours they drove through that hideous welter until at last the wind began to subside. The hurricane's force had been spent and the worst was over.

Ted was almost exhausted when he realized at last that he had outridden the hurricane. He was drenched with perspiration from head to foot and felt limp and weak.

But dominating all his weariness was a sense of exhilaration and gratitude for his safety. He and his gallant plane had come through with flying colors.

He had no accurate idea of where he was. He had been driven first in one direction and then in another. From a study of his instruments, however, he gathered roughly that he had been driven chiefly in the direction of Haiti and San Domingo.

It did not matter much, he told himself. They could not land, anyway, until dawn.

He tested the gas in his tanks and was relieved to find that he had enough to last him until daylight. He rejoiced at the thought that that morning he had had them filled to their utmost capacity.

One bitter regret remained to torment him.

That was that at the very moment that he had discovered the Island of the Cross of Palms he had been snatched away from it by the hurricane.

If that storm had only held off for an hour longer, he might have found some landing place and been at this moment safely sheltered somewhere on the island that had been the goal of the expedition of the missing flyers. And perhaps—the thought sent a thrill through him—he might have found Paul Monet and Tom Ralston there safe and sound!

Now he might sail about the Caribbean for days or weeks before chance would vouchsafe him another glimpse of the island. He had found the needle in the haystack, only to have it slip back again into the stack, with all the weary hunting to be done over again.

A note came through the tube from Mr. Hapworth. By the light on the dial plate Ted read:

"Splendid work! Only Ted Scott could have ridden that storm!"

Ted scribbled back:

"Oh, I don't know. The main thing is that we're alive. What I do know is that I'm as hungry as a wolf. Can you slip me a sandwich and the thermos bottle?"

The articles required were promptly handed over and the hot coffee had never been more grateful.

A little while later the moon and stars came out, and Ted sent a note to Mr. Hapworth requesting him to take observations. At the same time he sent the plane up to a height of fifteen thousand feet so that the navigator's view might be unobstructed.

The navigator did his work and then figured out his calculations. He reported by note:

"I figure that we're over Haiti. Could almost wish it had been anywhere else, for it's a fearfully mountainous country, and it will be no easy matter to find a landing place."

But land of any kind was preferable to being over the sea at that particular time, for Ted was uneasy about the strain the plane might have sustained in that terrific blow, and wanted to get down to earth and give the machine a thorough overhauling.

He resolved, therefore, to keep circling about in the same general locality and see what morning would bring.

It would have been much pleasanter to have been over Cuba. For that was a settled and well administered country, and landing there would be accompanied by no peril.

But he had heard queer tales of Haiti, a large part of which had never been explored by white men. He knew that of recent years the United States marines had introduced a certain amount of law and order in the dis-

tricts near the coast. But even Uncle Sam's long arm did not reach into the interior, and there were hundreds of square miles where no law but that of might prevailed. Many bandit bands had been broken up, but others were still in existence, and it behooved any white traveler to watch his step and keep his rifle ready.

He had heard stories of voodooism and cannibalism also, and although these had no doubt been exaggerated, he was not ready to discount them wholly. All in all, it was probably the worst place in the West Indies in which to find one's self adrift.

The night seemed eternal to the wearied watchers in the plane, but dawn came at last, and as the shadows disappeared Ted gazed eagerly at the brightening land below.

For a moment it seemed almost as though he must be over the Rockies with which he was so familiar. Rugged peaks thrust themselves upward toward the sky and between them yawned great gorges that descended for thousands of feet.

The scenery was indescribably grand and majestic, and under other circumstances Ted would have been filled with awe and admiration. But at the moment he would far rather have seen a prosaic field that offered some chance for landing.

But nothing of the kind was in sight. As far

as the eye could reach there was nothing but those huge spires and buttresses of granite.

If anything should go wrong now with the plane, its occupants would be doomed, for a landing was impossible.

A note came through the tube.

"Looks bad," Mr. Hapworth had written. "This district may extend for many miles. Haiti is one of the most mountainous parts of the West Indies. What are you going to do?"

Ted scribbled back:

"Nothing to do but keep going. There must be a plateau here and there that will be level enough to land on. Keep your eyes open."

For more than an hour the search continued. Then, to Ted's vast relief, he descried a comparatively flat plateau at a little distance to his right. He turned the nose of the *Silver Streak* toward it, and found that it included an area of about half a mile in length and as much in width, plenty of room for a landing and subsequent take-off.

He descended slowly in wide spirals until he had selected an appropriate spot, and then brought the plane down to a comparatively smooth landing.

It was with infinite satisfaction that the weary voyagers, after their night of stress and combat, climbed out of the plane and stretched their cramped limbs. There had been times

through that night when their chances of ever feeling the firm earth beneath their feet had been almost nil.

Every instinct in them cried out for sleep, but they did not dare to yield to the craving. There would be plenty of time for that when they should once more find themselves in touch with civilization.

A little brook was rushing over rocks near by, and in this they gave themselves the luxury of a refreshing bath. Then they made a frugal meal of sandwiches and coffee and betook themselves promptly to an examination of the plane.

It had stood the gale surprisingly well, but certain of the struts had been bent and weakened and it required a couple of hours of steady work before they felt that it was in proper shape for further journeying.

There had been no trace of any inhabitants of that remote region. No trails were in evidence, no signs of village or isolated hut, no thread of smoke ascending to the sky.

"Looks as though we had the place all to ourselves," observed Mr. Haworth.

"That's all to the good," replied Ted. "From all I've heard, the people in this part of the island are good ones to keep away from."

He had scarcely spoken when at a little distance they heard the sound of footsteps crashing through the brush that bordered the edge

of the little clearing and a little later they could hear the sound of voices.

The aviators looked at each other with an unspoken question in their eyes.

Walter Hapworth reached for his rifle, but Ted laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"Don't," he warned. "We can grab them later if we need to. Whoever they are, we don't want to act as though we were suspicious or hostile. Let's wait and see."

The sound of footsteps drew nearer. Then the brush parted, and a gigantic negro of repulsive appearance stepped into the clearing.

CHAPTER XVII

The Bandit Chief

The man was fully six feet four inches in height and built in proportion. Huge gold rings were in his ears and heavy bracelets of the same material were on his wrists. He had a flat nose, thick lips, a low forehead and eyes that glittered with ferocity.

For the moment, however, that ferocity was partly veiled by what the giant no doubt assumed to be a friendly smile as he advanced toward the two aviators who made no movement, but stood negligently at the side of the plane within easy reach of their rifles, which were concealed from sight in the fuselage.

Ted noted that the negro cast a rapid glance at their belts as though to see whether they carried weapons. The result of the glance seemed to be satisfactory, for the man advanced with more assurance and a touch of insolence.

He himself had a revolver in his belt and a murderous looking machete that seemed to be

about a foot long and had two edges, sharpened to a razorlike keenness.

In the edge of the brush the airmen could discern a number of half-naked forms with woolly heads and faces as brutal as their chief's. It was not a reassuring sight.

The man stopped within a few feet of them and surveyed them silently.

"Good morning," said Ted calmly, with no touch of apprehension in his voice.

The fellow made no response to the salutation. He looked from them to the plane.

"How you get here?" he asked abruptly. "What you doing in black man's country?"

"We were driven here by the storm and had to come down," explained Ted. "We are going away soon."

This seemed to amuse the negro immensely. He laughed aloud.

"No," he said, "you not going away very soon."

"Why not?" asked Ted, longing to wipe the derision off the grinning face.

"Because I not let you," was the reply. "You my prisoners."

"How is that?" asked Ted. "We are friendly. We are not doing harm to any one."

"You are here and I am here," replied the giant. "And my men are here. Over there," and he waved his hand toward the brush.

"Many men. Twenty men. You my prisoners."

"We are American citizens," replied Ted. "Our government will punish any one who harms us."

This seemed another huge joke to the giant.

" 'Merican government far away," and he grinned. "It never reach me. It never find me. I laugh."

"What do you propose to do with us?" asked Ted, sparring for time.

"I keep you," replied the bandit. "I take your money, your watches, your clothes. Then you tell us who your friends are, friends that have money. We send word to them we have you prisoner. They pay money. Then we let you go."

"Suppose our friends refuse to send the money?" asked Ted, keeping himself under control with an effort.

Again the giant laughed.

"Then we send them an ear cut from your heads," he replied. "We tell them other ear will follow, maybe nose, maybe eye, if they send not the money. They will send," he added confidently.

With a motion so quick that the eye could scarcely follow it, Ted snatched his rifle from the fuselage and leveled it at the giant's heart.

"Up with your hands!" he commanded.

The fellow was taken so completely by surprise that he stood for a moment as though paralyzed. Then his hand reached toward the revolver at his belt.

"Hands up, or you die!" cried Ted.

There was such deadly menace in the young aviator's blazing eyes that the giant's hands slowly lifted.

There was a commotion in the brush as though the bandit's followers were about to make a rush.

"Tell your men," cried Ted, "that if one of them stirs a foot, you'll get a bullet through your heart. Tell them, quick!"

The bandit glared at Ted Scott and saw that he meant exactly what he said.

He turned and shouted to his men in a patois that the airmen could not understand. But its purport was immediately evident as the fellows shrank back into the bushes.

"Now, Walter," said Ted to Mr. Hapworth, who had also grasped his rifle and stood ready. "Take part of the rope in the fuselage and bind this fellow to that tree," indicating one near at hand. "Walk to that tree and stand with your back to it," he commanded his glowering captive, who was fairly foaming at the mouth with helpless rage. "One false move and you're a dead man."

The negro did as directed, and Walter Hap-

worth tied him securely about the arms and legs to the tree.

"I could kill you, you scoundrel," Ted addressed his captive when the work was finished, "but I'm going to let you live to be a laughing stock to your men. Their big chief trussed up like a chicken! Walter," he addressed his companion, "start the engine going and climb in for a quick departure."

Mr. Hapworth did as directed, and the moment the engine began to hum Ted Scott threw his rifle into the fuselage and with one jump was at the controls.

As he did so, a yell broke from the captive's lips. It was doubtless a command to attack, for a score of black forms broke from the brush and rushed toward the machine.

But the *Silver Streak* was under way now and whizzed directly into the onrushing mass, knocking them right and left amid wild uproar and confusion. Some scattering revolver shots followed the plane, but the aviators ducked low and escaped unscathed. A moment more and the *Silver Streak* soared into the skies and out of range.

But Ted Scott did not at once turn its nose toward the coast. Instead, he circled round for a few minutes and with intense satisfaction viewed the scene below.

The bandits, after their would-be prey had

escaped them, had gathered about their chief and were busy unloosing his bonds.

The baffled giant was in convulsions of shame and rage. Ted could see him dancing about, shouting, gesticulating and shaking his fist at the plane. Ted enjoyed it more than any show he had seen in all his life.

That Mr. Hapworth shared his feeling was evident from the note that came through the tube:

"His nibs seems to be peevish about something. I wonder what it can be?"

Ted grinned and scribbled in reply:

"I wonder. Can it be that he's vexed with us for something we've done?"

He settled himself comfortably in his seat and turned the nose of the plane toward Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. There he would refuel his plane, for he knew that his gasoline supply was running low. He tested his main tank. Then he turned pale.

His trained ear detected that the tank was nearly empty!

CHAPTER XVIII

A Race for Life

Ted Scott's heart was filled with consternation at the ominous discovery.

How could it be? While they were tinkering with the plane on the ground, he had calculated there was enough gas easily to carry them to the coast. Now only a few minutes of sailing in the air had elapsed, but the supply had enormously decreased.

He rushed a note through the tube to his companion.

"Take my seat. Gas running low. I want to examine the tank."

Mr. Hapworth promptly obeyed, and Ted made a hasty examination of the tank. He uttered an exclamation when he found a small hole through which the supply was leaking.

He sensed the situation at once. One of the bullets that had followed the plane from the bandit's guns had penetrated the tank.

With frantic haste he repaired and plugged the hole, and then, resuming his place at the

controls, sent the *Silver Streak* zipping toward the main seaport of the Haitian republic.

It was a race now for safety, for life. If the plane became disabled over these mountains, perhaps at a moment when no landing was possible, it would go crashing down on some peak or into a gorge and that would be the end of the plane and probably of its occupants.

On and on he went as though fiends were in pursuit of him. With every passing minute the gas was sinking lower. It was good perhaps for an hour, no longer.

Ten minutes passed. Twenty! Thirty! The plane was whizzing through the air like a meteor.

Now the mountain ranges were beginning to lessen in height. Ten minutes more and they had diminished into foothills.

The engine was beginning to cough, to knock, to miss. It was protesting, calling for more gas.

Ten minutes more, and in the distance could be seen the blue waters of the sea.

Five minutes more and the white buildings of Port-au-Prince came in sight. And now the *Silver Streak* was beginning to wobble like a weary bird whose wings were giving out.

Hoping against hope, racing against fate, Ted nursed her along until he was over the military flying field. There on a tall staff

fluttered the Stars and Stripes. His heart thrilled at the sight.

Then the engine fluttered, rasped, and stopped just as Ted brought the *Silver Streak* down to a landing. The tank was dry!

The captain of the marine force stationed at the field, a trim, keen, soldierly man, sauntered up to the voyagers as they stepped from the plane.

"Your plane seemed to be in trouble," he remarked, with a genial smile. "Guess it wouldn't have gone much further."

"Hardly," replied Ted. "The tank's as dry as a bone. This field certainly looked good to us."

"Been flying far?" asked the captain.

"A couple of thousand miles, I shouldn't wonder," replied Ted. "All day yesterday and all night. Got caught in the hurricane and couldn't land till this morning."

"You don't mean to say you were aloft in that blow?" exclaimed the captain, aghast. "How on earth did you ever live through it?"

"You won't be so surprised," put in Walter Hapworth, "when you learn that Ted Scott was at the helm."

The officer started back.

"Ted Scott!" he exclaimed, as he stared at Ted. "You don't mean the man that flew across the Atlantic?"

"There he is in the flesh," replied Mr. Hapworth.

The captain reached out his hand.

"Shake," he said. "This is an honor I never expected to have, a rare bit of good luck. The post will be all stirred up when they learn that you are here."

"My friend is too modest to say that he also is a transoceanic flyer," remarked Ted. "This is Mr. Hapworth, who made the flight with me to Honolulu."

"Two of a kind, I see," remarked the captain, as he shook hands heartily with Walter Hapworth. "I'm delighted to meet you. My name is Carleton. Come to my quarters. You must be my guest while you're here. That is," he added, with a smile, "until the colonel and general get news of it and snatch you away from me. I'll have to notify them right away, or they'd never forgive me."

"Please don't," begged Ted. "It's awfully kind of you, but I'm on a private errand this time and have to cut out all social formalities. I'm going to ask you to keep this to yourself."

"Why, of course, if you say so," responded Carleton, much disappointed. "But I was hoping that you were going to be some time with us and let us give you a royal time. The boys would be more delighted to meet you than they would the President of the United States.

There are lots of presidents coming and going, but there's only one Ted Scott in the whole world."

Ted flushed at the hearty tribute.

"It's mighty good of you to say so, however undeserved it may be," he said. "I'd like ever so much to meet the boys, for everybody knows what the marines are. But time is very precious to us just now. The fact is, we're scouring these seas and islands in search of a couple of friends of ours who set off on a journey to the West Indies and haven't since been heard from. I wonder if perhaps you have any news of them," and he went on to describe the *Blue Gull* and its passengers.

When he had finished Captain Carleton shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, "but I haven't heard a word about them. Nor do I know anything about the location of the island with crossed palms. You say you saw it, though, last night just before the blow came on. Don't suppose you had time to get its latitude and longitude?"

"No," said Ted regretfully. "We had our hands full in trying to ride out the storm. But at least we know that there is such a place, and we'll keep on until we see it again."

"I hope you'll have that luck," said the captain warmly. "But now it's near mess time and I want you to come to my quarters and

have something to eat. I'll see that we three dine by ourselves, since you won't let me disclose your identity."

The two aviators expressed their thanks and gladly accepted the invitation.

Captain Carleton called a couple of the mechanics on the field and gave directions for refueling the plane and perfecting the temporary repairs that Ted had already made to the tank. Then he led the way to his quarters where an appetizing meal was in preparation.

"When and where did you come down this morning?" asked the captain, as the three sat down to table.

"Somewhere up in the mountains a hundred miles or so from here," replied Ted. "It was easier coming down than getting away again," he added, with a smile.

"How was that?" asked the captain, as he carved a chicken.

"Bandits got after us," replied Ted.

The captain's knife and fork clattered to the platter.

"Bandits!" he exclaimed, staring at Ted.

CHAPTER XIX

The Wrecked Plane

"That's what I said—bandits," repeated Ted Scott, in answer to Captain Carleton's exclamation. "Real honest-to-goodness bandits. Their chief was a big negro, a regular giant, and what he was going to do to us was a-plenty."

"A gigantic negro!" repeated their host. "Rings in his ears? Bracelets on his wrists?"

"And bells on his toes, for all I know," laughed Ted. "I couldn't see them. He was certainly togged up to the nines in jewelry. And he had a face like those you see in nightmares."

"Salo Jumbo!" exclaimed Captain Carleton. "The description fits him to a dot. The most ferocious bandit chief in the island! We've sent a detachment of the marines after him time and again, but have never been able to find him."

"We found him," replied Ted. "Rather, he found us. Came along with about twenty

of his men while we were tinkering with the plane."

"And you got away from him!" exclaimed the captain, in wonder.

"We're here, aren't we?" laughed Ted. "But it was a close call. He told us nice little bedtime stories of what he was going to do with us if our friends didn't ransom us—cut off our ears, our noses, dig out our eyes perhaps, and send them to our friends as reminders that they'd better pay up. Oh, he was a genial soul, all right!"

"And he'd have done it, too!" exclaimed the captain. "Blood-curdling stories are told of his cruelty. He has a score of murders on his soul. And if no ransom money had come to him, he would finally have put you to death with the most dreadful tortures. He is a fiend incarnate. But how in thunder did you get away from him?"

Ted rapidly sketched the way he had surprised and held up the chief while Mr. Hapworth had bound him, and how the onward rush of the plane had scattered the bandit's followers.

"Well," the captain breathed when the story was finished, "for quick thinking and lightning action that takes the prize. Regular Ted Scott nerve! You've simply got to let me tell the boys about it after you've gone. I won't give

your right name, if you insist upon it. But they're as sore as the mischief at the fruitless chases Salo Jumbo's led them, and they'll be pleased at the way he's been manhandled. All they'll kick about is that you didn't send a bullet through his heart. It would only have been a deserved execution."

"He was bound and helpless and I couldn't do that," explained Ted simply. "I hope you'll get him and string him up or send him to the electric chair. As it is, he's got some punishment. He's been made to look as cheap as dirt to his followers. They'll make him the joke of the camp—under their breath, of course."

The captain chuckled.

"Yes," he said, "that's one satisfaction. He's a vain scoundrel, fairly bursting with conceit. You hit him in his weakest place. Trussed up like a chicken!" The chuckle deepened to a roar of laughter. "The mighty Salo Jumbo! He'll sing small for a while. But, oh, what he'd do to you if he could only lay his hands on you now."

The captain took careful note of the exact region where they had seen the bandits, as far as Ted and Mr. Hapworth could give it, and promised that a party of marines would be dispatched there at once on the chance of at last capturing the fiend.

The meal over, the aviator, accompanied by

their host, went out to the flying field. Here they found the *Silver Streak* fully repaired and refueled and ready for the start.

"This has been a red-letter day with me," observed Captain Carleton warmly, as he shook hands with his guests. "I'll remember all my life that I've seen and talked with Ted Scott and the man who dared the Pacific with him and had them as my guests at lunch. The trouble is that you won't let me tell of it, though I'm fairly bursting with it. You have a mean disposition," and he grinned.

Ted laughed.

"That holds good only for a month," he said. "After that my mission will have either failed or succeeded, and you can talk as much as you like. Though why you should make so much of it beats me."

"As modest as you are brave," replied the captain. "No wonder the nation goes mad over you! Well, so long and good luck."

The aviators waved a cordial farewell and mounted into the air.

With plenty of fuel and the heap of fruits and edibles that the captain had insisted on crowding into the fuselage, they were well equipped for a long cruise.

They had been tempted to accept the captain's urging and take a long sleep, going on the next morning. But, sorely as they needed

sleep after the weary vigil and heart-straining excitement they had undergone, the daylight hours were too precious to be devoted to the drowsy god. They promised that they would land at twilight and compensate themselves by a long night of slumber.

"Where away now?" asked a note from Mr. Hapworth.

"Somewhere near Martinique," Ted wrote in answer. "I figure that we were not far from there yesterday when we sighted the island with the crossed palms. Let's hope that with fair weather we'll have better luck."

They ran at full speed for several hundred miles, scanning the waters and islands that passed beneath them for any sign of the lost flyers.

Ted's heart gave a bound when Martinique loomed up in the distance with the fateful Mont Pelée towering high into the air over the city of St. Pierre that had fallen victim to the most terrible volcanic eruption that had ever happened since Vesuvius had overwhelmed Herculaneum and Pompeii.

It had happened in 1902, years before Ted had been born, but he had read of it again and again with a terrible fascination. And now, as he hovered over the city, the awful facts came to his mind with startling distinctness.

Never had disaster been more sudden. It

was a festival day, and St. Pierre, one of the prettiest little cities in the West Indies, with its white-fronted houses and red roofs and green jalousies, had never been more alive and joyous. Then suddenly the whole side of the mountain seemed to burst apart, and a whirlwind of fire and gas and ashes swept over the doomed town, shriveling every living thing into nothingness. The fiery mass swept like a river over the town and set the ships in the harbor ablaze. Forty thousand people were choked to death and burned to a crisp.

It was distressing even to hover over a place of such awful ruin, and Ted put out again to sea.

He had not gone far before a floating mass beneath the *Silver Streak* attracted his attention. He lowered the plane toward it, and his excitement grew as he neared the object. When he had got within a hundred feet of the surface there was no longer room for doubt.

He was looking at the wreck of a biplane. And the plane was blue in color!

CHAPTER XX

The Cross of Palms

Ted Scott felt a clutch on his shoulder, and, turning, looked into the face of Mr. Hapworth. It was blazing with excitement. The navigator pointed below to the wreckage and his lips framed the words: *"Blue Gull!"*

Ted nodded in reply and pushed the stick.

Lower and lower the *Silver Streak* descended until they were so near the surface that drops of spray spattered against the fuselage.

Ted circled slowly about the wreck, his heart in his mouth. Was it indeed the *Blue Gull,* or all that remained of it?

He scanned the biplane with the eyes of a hawk. The motor and the heavier metal parts had been torn away and had sunk. But the fuselage and wings, though cracked and battered, were still there.

Yes, there was the stabilizer of which Tom Ralston had been so proud. There was the split-axle type undercarriage. There were the wheels, streamlined with aluminum discs.

There were the welded-in fittings of the flying wires.

Ted Scott had never needed more than a few minutes' inspection of any plane to grasp its essential features. And he had spent half an hour with Tom, going over Paul Monet's plane. He was sure now that he was looking at the plane he had seen mounting so proudly aloft from the air field at Bromville.

Then the last vestige of uncertainty vanished when on a broken section he saw the lettering:

UE GUL

It was all that remained of the plane of the missing flyers!

Ted Scott turned in his seat and looked at his companion. For a long moment their eyes held.

Their hearts were sick with foreboding. For the first time since their quest had begun they had found something definite. But the finding itself was ominous. It spelled disaster.

If the plane had fallen into the surging waters of the Caribbean, what chance was there that the flyers themselves had escaped drowning?

Certainly they had not been picked up by any vessel, or the fact would have been reported.

Ted knew that they had had a collapsible

rubber boat on board. That, however, was a frail reliance. It might have helped, if they had been near shore. But at any distance away it would probably have been engulfed in a short time.

With a dreadful conviction that he would never look upon his friends' faces again, Ted Scott slowly rose to a height of five hundred feet. Dusk was coming on and it behooved him to reach a town before darkness closed in.

He turned the nose of the plane toward Fort de France, the capital of Martinique, and reached it in time to make a twilight landing. Then, after arranging for the care of the plane, Walter Hapworth and Ted made their way to the chief hotel of the place.

Their hearts were full of just one subject, but it was so distressing that each hesitated to broach it.

"Looks bad, doesn't it?" said Ted at last.

"It surely does," assented Mr. Hapworth gloomily. "I'm afraid we've seen the last of Paul and Tom. That floating plane tells a terrible story."

"I fear so. Even if it doesn't prove that they are dead, it indicates that they must be in serious trouble. That plane looked as though it might have been in the water for at least two weeks."

"Yes. And in that time it may have trav-

eled hundreds of miles. It doesn't give us the least indication as to where the wreck happened."

"Well, it simplifies our task," observed Ted. "Instead of studying the water now, we can devote all our attention to the land. They may have found refuge on some cay or island."

"And that certainly wouldn't have been one of the inhabited ones," added Mr. Hapworth. "In that case they'd have found some means of reporting their location and condition. If they're alive at all, they're stranded on some sandspit or small island. Perhaps it's barren and they may be suffering for lack of food. Don't you remember what an experience Paul's half-brother had—the one who gave Paul the information about the pearls?"

"I wish he'd never had the experience; or that, at least, he'd never told about it," said Ted. "Then Paul and Tom would never have started on this search. All the pearls in the world aren't worth their two lives."

"We'll get the earliest start possible to-morrow morning," declared Mr. Hapworth.

"You bet we will!" replied Ted with emphasis. "And our special goal will be the Island of the Cross of Palms. Somehow, I have a feeling that if Paul and Tom are anywhere, we'll find them there."

Following the usual custom, the daily cable

was sent home on the forlorn hope that possibly Mr. Monet and Tom had been rescued, picked up perhaps by a vessel, and were safe and sound in Bromville. They said nothing in the cablegram of the finding of the wrecked *Blue Gull.* Bad news could wait. It would be hard enough when they had to tell it.

At the first streak of dawn the searchers climbed aboard the *Silver Streak* and started once more on their quest.

They had taken on board an unusual supply of food, far more than they needed for themselves, on the supposition that if they should find the castaways the latter would be in dire need of provisions.

With strained eyes they scanned every island that came within their ken, sweeping their glasses over it in the hope of discovering some human figures.

But there were long stretches of sea where nothing but water reached to the horizon's rim, and then, with his attention relaxed, Ted could think of other things.

The thought of Greg and Duck Gale was never far absent from his mind. Where were those reprobates? In the streets of the various cities that he and Mr. Hapworth had visited he had been constantly on the lookout for their faces in the crowds. He had made inquiries, also, whenever an opportunity offered, had ex-

amined the registers of hotels, but had found no trace of them.

He was hampered by the possibility—more than that, the probability—that the fugitives were traveling under assumed names. About his only chance was to catch sight of their faces, which could not be easily disguised.

No word had come from Mark Lawson, nor in the two letters he had received from Eben Browning had any mention been made of the return of the rascals. Probably, Ted told himself, they had continued on their flight to South America. He had almost relinquished expectation of ever seeing them again.

He was aroused from his musings by the sight of a small island rising out of the sea. A haze had dimmed the brightness of the sun and a slight drizzle had begun, so that it was some time before Ted could note the features of the island.

But as the plane got nearer Ted straightened in his seat with a convulsive start.

He was looking upon the Island of the Cross of Palms!

CHAPTER XXI

The Castaways

Ted Scott rubbed his eyes and looked again. He was not dreaming. There stood the two lines of palm trees, making a perfect cross, not so distinct as it might be because of the mist and rain, but undeniably there.

He turned to Mr. Hapworth and saw in his friend's eyes the same excitement that shone in his own.

Ted turned the nose of the plane downward until he was flying at a height of not more than two hundred feet and looked eagerly for a landing place.

This was by no means easy to find, for on the east side, where he was, the surf beat upon massive rocks that looked grim and forbidding, and the narrow strip of sand that served as beach was studded with other rocks that made a landing impossible. But he circled the island, and on the west side found a broader stretch of sand that was more inviting.

It was nearing twilight now, and this, to-

gether with the mist, made it necessary to take the utmost precaution in landing. It would be one of life's most tragic ironies if the plane should be wrecked just when the goal of their journey was within reach.

In all the spiraling about the aviators had seen no sign of anything living on the island. Every part of it was in full sight, but no figures moved anywhere on its surface.

Ted brought the *Silver Streak* slowly down on the sandy beach and, guiding the plane with consummate skill as it taxied along, brought it to a stop right at the edge of the water.

He jumped out and with the aid of his navigator trundled the aeroplane up on the sands, well out of reach of the waves.

"What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth, raising his head in the attitude of listening.

"Sounded like some one calling!" ejaculated Ted, a thrill of hope pulsing through him. "Can it be—"

Just then around a little knoll came running at the top of his speed and waving his hands wildly—Paul Monet!

There was a wild shout from Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth, and the next instant their arms were about their friend, hugging him as though they would drive the breath from his body.

"Found at last!" yelled Ted.

"Ted! Walter!" cried Mr. Monet, his eyes suffused with tears of happiness. "So you came for me? I might have known you would! The best and bravest friends I have on earth!"

A flood of questions and answers followed, but no one knew clearly what he was saying. They were simply incoherent with joy and thanksgiving.

"I heard the roar of your plane," said Paul Monet. "It came to my ears in the depths of the cave where I was sleeping, utterly worn out and exhausted. I rubbed my eyes. I thought I must be going mad, that I was imagining. Then I rushed out and sought all about, but by that time you had got around to this side of the island. Then I felt sure I must be going mad. But I ran and then I saw you—"

He broke down utterly then, and they waited till he had recovered from his emotion.

"Where is Tom Ralston?" asked Ted, who had been looking round for some trace of Mr. Monet's companion.

Poignant grief came into Paul Monet's face.

"I do not know," he said, wringing his hands. "I fear that he is lost."

"Lost!" cried Ted, in consternation. "Didn't he reach this island with you?"

"Yes," replied Monet. "But he ventured into one of the caves of the island," he added. "He had to swim to reach it and he has not

come back. I cannot swim, or I would have gone after him. Oh, I have gone almost crazy, shouting, calling, looking for him!"

He beat his breast and was so evidently on the verge of a nervous collapse that Walter Hapworth interposed.

"Calm yourself, Paul," he counseled gently. "We're here now, and we can swim. We'll do everything possible to help Tom. Just get yourself together and then tell exactly what has happened from the beginning. We'll get at the facts more quickly in that way, and then we'll be able to act intelligently."

Thus adjured, Paul Monet tried to regain his self-control and obey his friend's suggestion.

"I will tell the story briefly, mon ami," he began. "We had a good journey and a quick one until we reached the West Indies. We had much trouble, though, in locating this island, and spent more than a week in cruising.

"Then one day we saw it and we were joyful. But as we were coming near to it something happened to the engine. There was an explosion and the *Blue Gull* fell into the water. We were tangled up in the wreckage and nearly drowned before we could get loose.

"Then Tom managed to get to the collapsible boat and, as we were not far out, we got to land. We were not able to save any of the supplies, but we did not care much for that at the time,

being so relieved to feel the solid ground beneath our feet.

"We found a cave on the other side of the island, and that gave us shelter from the sun and the storms. But of food there was scarcely any. We lived on what shellfish we could gather and berries and cocoanuts. I have not grown stout, as you can see," he said, with a wan attempt at a smile.

"You poor fellow!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth. "We'll soon remedy that. We have plenty of food in our plane. But go on."

"Yes," put in Ted, "tell us about Tom."

Paul Monet's face paled with anguish.

"Tom!" he exclaimed. "Brave, splendid Tom! Shall I ever be forgiven for bringing him here?" He groaned, and buried his face in his hands.

After a moment he resumed:

"We studied the map. See, I have it here," and he drew the old stained paper from his pocket. "We figured out that this arrow indicated the place of the cave of pearls. We went to that part of the beach, but could see no cave entrance either at low water or high tide. But there was a jutting crag that cut off the view of what might lie beyond it, and Tom said that he would swim out there and see. As I said, I cannot swim, or I should have gone myself. I saw him go around the crag. I heard him call

out that he saw a place that seemed to be an entrance to a cave and that he was going in. That was two days ago. I have not seen him since."

His voice broke.

"I called. I shouted. I prayed," he continued after a moment. "I thought I should go mad. But Tom did not answer. And he did not come back."

"Couldn't you have used the collapsible boat?" asked Ted.

"Alas! It was gone. We thought that we had placed it beyond the reach of the water, but a storm drove the waves far in, and when we looked for it it was gone. Fool! Fool that I was not to be more careful!" he cried in savage self-reproach.

"Where is this cave?" asked Ted. "On this side of the island or the other?"

"What's in your mind, Ted?" asked Mr. Hapworth quickly.

"I'm going to swim out and look for Tom," cried the young aviator.

CHAPTER XXII

Pirate of the Sea

Walter Hapworth laid a restraining hand on Ted's arm.

"Listen, Ted," he said. "You've got to go at this carefully. I want to rescue Tom, if he's still alive, as much as you do. But I don't want you to commit suicide. In ten minutes it will be dark. It's a daylight job, if there ever was one. Besides, it's high water now, and from all we've learned the entrance would be covered. You can do nothing till low tide. Listen to reason, Ted."

The argument was sound and Ted Scott felt its force, but impatience lashed him like a whip.

"But Tom!" he cried. "Good old Tom! He may be starving, dying in that cave! How can I wait till morning?"

"Hard luck, but there's no help for it," returned his friend. "One of two things is true. Either poor Tom is dead—though I trust not—and in that case you can do him no good. On

the other hand, if he is safe in the cave and for some reason cannot get out—he may have good reasons—the worst that can happen to him now is to stay one night more without food. It wouldn't help him any if you lost your life in trying to help him too soon."

Seething with a frantic desire for action as he was, Ted had to yield reluctantly to what he knew in his heart was wise counsel and defer his attempt till morning.

The two newcomers accompanied Mr. Monet to the cave that he had made his home on the other side of the island. It was little more than a recess in a cliff, but it was shelter.

They unloaded their supplies from the plane, and Paul Monet had the first satisfying meal that he had had since he had lost touch with civilization.

After the meal they sat on the sand outside the cave, where Mr. Monet recited in detail all that had happened since he and Tom had left Bromville. The others told him in return the incidents of their long quest, including the finding of the remains of the *Blue Gull* off the coast of Martinique.

"It has been a terrible experience for both you and me and worst of all for poor Tom," Mr. Monet said, with a deep sigh. "Everything has gone wrong. And there is Nina! Poor girl, I fear she is grieving her heart out

with worry on the plantation, waiting for me to come and wondering why I do not."

"She is grieving, no doubt, but not on the plantation," replied Ted. "She is safe in Bromville under my foster mother's care."

Paul Monet was astounded.

"What? Nina in Bromville?"

"Yes," replied Ted. "There was trouble on the plantation—insolent overseer or something of the kind—and she got frightened and took a steamer for the States. She came straight to us, and she'll stay there till your return. She's a charming girl, and mother and she are great friends."

"Oh, I am glad!" exclaimed Paul Monet. "You have taken a heavy weight from my mind. Nina safe and with that dear Madame Browning! Oh, what it is to have such good friends!"

"About this cave that Tom swam for," said Ted after a short time. He could not dismiss his comrade from his mind for a moment. "Are you sure that that is the cave of the pearls?"

"I have assumed that it is," answered Mr. Monet. "The map clearly indicated it, and my brother was here long enough not to make a mistake. I have looked for others, however, but have not been able to find any."

"If it really is the pearl cave, Tom ought to

find enough of the oysters to keep him from starving," conjectured Ted hopefully. "Is there no other way to reach the cave than by swimming?"

"I fear not," was the reply. "A big cliff rises sheer above it. It is straight up and down and as slippery as glass. No one could ascend or descend it."

"I guess it's a swim for me," said Ted, "and you bet I'll take it as soon as it's light enough to see."

"I—I hate to suggest even the thought," faltered Mr. Monet. "But you remember what I told you about the guardian of the cave?"

"The devilfish?"

"Yes. The thought has come to me that perhaps poor Tom met some of those creatures and that that is the reason he has not returned."

"Have you seen any of those creatures since you have been on the island?" queried Mr. Hapworth.

"No. But that proves nothing. There are plenty of them in these waters, but they are so secretive that they are seldom seen."

"Well," said Ted, "it makes no difference. Devilfish or no devilfish, I'm going to look for Tom. He would do as much for me in a minute."

"Here's a suggestion, Ted," said Walter Hapworth. "Suppose at dawn we go up in the

Silver Streak and get the bearings of the cave? It will be low water then, and the entrance to the cave will be uncovered. Perhaps, too, if this infernal guardian of the cave really exists, we can get a glimpse of him and perhaps get a shot at him with our rifles."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Ted. "A dose of lead might do the work."

The three made beds of brushwood and sought sleep. But sleep would not come to Ted Scott and he lay the night through in agonizing thoughts about his missing friend.

At the first streak of dawn Walter Hapworth's suggestion was carried out. With their rifles carefully loaded and an extra one for Mr. Monet, who was a famous shot, they mounted into the air and soon reached a position above the spot where Paul Monet believed the cave to be situated.

The cliff faced the east, so that the rays of the rising sun struck directly against its face.

At the base was descried an opening that at the present state of low water seemed to be about three feet high and five feet wide. The sea was quiet at the time and the water swirled lazily in and out of the opening. A good swimmer would have no trouble in reaching the entrance.

All studied it carefully. Then Ted gave an

abrupt start. His keen eyes had seen something else!

About twenty feet from the entrance to the cave an enormous shark of the man-eating variety was swimming to and fro! It did not seem to be moving about in the pursuit of food. Rather it seemed to be waiting—watching. There was something about it suggestive of a sentinel.

Ted caught his companions' eyes and motioned frantically toward the shark. They looked and saw, and their consternation equaled Ted's own.

It was known now why poor Tom Ralston, if he were still alive, had not ventured to come out from his retreat. That awful sentinel was reason enough.

Ted Scott looked over all the waters roundabout. No other black fin cut the water. He let the plane down as low as he dared, having to stand off a little way to avoid contact with the cliff.

Ted picked up his rifle and took careful aim. His companions did the same.

Bang!

Three rifles spoke as one!

CHAPTER XXIII

In Deadly Peril

Almost simultaneously with the roar of the rifles, the shark leaped half out of the water and then fell back in a welter of foam, while a ruddy tinge suffused the water.

The creature thrashed and floundered about for a few moments, at times seeming to bend almost double. Then its struggles ceased, it turned over on its back and floated just below the surface. One of the bullets, at least, had found a vital spot.

His heart thrilling with exultation, Ted Scott pulled on the stick, raised the *Silver Streak* into the air and swept swiftly around to the landing place. He had already formulated his plan and he lost no time in imparting it to his friends.

"Here's my idea," he said, as soon as the engine had stopped running. "That shark seemed to be alone. But it won't be long before the smell of its blood will attract others. Now's my time. I'm going to swim to that

cave. No use," he said, as his companions looked as though they were about to interrupt him. "My mind's made up. Now this is what you can do. You, Walter, take the stick and you and Mr. Monet go up just where we were before. Keep guard with your rifles. We've killed one shark. You can kill another if it comes nosing around."

Without waiting for an answer, Ted jumped out of the plane and ran to the part of the beach nearest to the cave, tearing off his jacket as he went.

Reaching the edge of the water, he stripped off his remaining garments and dived in.

Like an arrow he clove the water, keeping a sharp lookout for the dreaded sea pirates. But there was none near, as far as he could see, and he kept on, putting all the power of his splendid muscles into every stroke.

In a few moments he heard the roar of the motor and, looking up, saw that it was hovering at about the same spot it had formerly occupied.

A thrill went through him as he rounded the jutting crag and brushed against the dead body of the shark. He caught a glimpse of the terrible teeth that a few minutes before could have bitten him in two as neatly as could a pair of giant shears.

The entrance was now in full view, and Ted

Scott swam directly for it. A moment later his foot touched bottom, and he waded up the shelving beach into the dark recesses of the cave.

Blinded for the moment, he could see nothing. But he did not need to see, for the next instant Tom, good old Tom, leaped forward and flung his arms about his chum's neck.

"Ted!"

"Tom!"

With wild delight surging through their veins, they stood apart and looked at each other.

Tom in the flesh! Tom, whom Ted had feared he would never see again!

Ted Scott was in the seventh heaven of rapture. But he wasted not an instant.

"Come, Tom!" he cried. "On the jump! Not a word! The shark is dead. But others will come. Quick! Follow me!"

He dashed into the water with Tom close on his heels.

The current had helped Ted coming in. Now it was against them. They fought it desperately, knowing the urgent need for haste.

They reached the crag side by side and made for the beach.

Two shots rang out!

Ted Scott's heart felt as though a galvanic shock had gone through it. He knew what

those shots meant. Other sharks had smelled the blood of the slain one and were hastening to the feast!

He cast a lightning glance behind him. A commotion at one spot disclosed part of a long body beating the water into spray. The shots had not been without effect.

But in the rapid glance he had seen three black fins cutting the water and coming toward him and Tom with the speed of an express train.

"Put all you've got into it, Tom!" Ted panted.

The two young aviators spurted desperately, swimming as they had never swum before. Now the cracking of rifles was like a fusillade. Walter Hapworth and Paul Monet, their hearts in their throats, were working like mad to save their imperiled comrades.

The beach was near now, but so were the pursuing sharks.

Ted found footing first. He stood upright, grabbed Tom by the shoulders and fairly hurled him up on the beach.

He leaped himself, just as a huge body launched itself at his legs. But the teeth missed by a hairbreadth, and the baffled monster swam ragingly away.

Further up on the beach the two comrades drew themselves, and then threw themselves

down on the hot sand, utterly spent. They had escaped from the very jaws of death.

Neither could speak a word for a while, but they clasped hands, and the looks they interchanged were eloquent of unspeakable relief and thankfulness.

The roar of the airplane came nearer, and in a few moments Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet jumped from the cockpit and came running toward the exhausted swimmers.

When the first ecstasy of reunion was over and Tom was able to talk, he told the story of his imprisonment in the cave.

He had reached it without any special difficulty, and as soon as he had rested had made a thorough examination. He had waded far out after he had inspected the cave and searched thoroughly for the oyster bed that was reputed to be near the entrance.

"But shucks!" he exclaimed in disgust. "Not an oyster could I see. Not even a shell in the water or the cave. Either they were never there or some one else has come along and made a clean sweep."

Paul Monet's eyes betrayed his disappointment.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Nothing at all?"

"Not a sign of anything," reaffirmed Tom. "I was as sore as the mischief, and was just thinking of getting into the water and coming

back when I saw that shark sailing around the entrance and sizing me up. Then I took another think."

Tom's hearers laughed.

"I should think you would," said Ted. "That fellow was a monster."

"I could hear Mr. Monet shouting," went on Tom, "and I called back, but the walls of the cave must have smothered my voice. I don't mind admitting I was scared. I kept hoping that shark would get tired and go away, but time didn't seem any object with him, and he stayed. He seemed to think he'd get me sooner or later. Well, that's about all. Got any food? I'm nearly starved. I've had nothing to eat except raw fish, stranded in little pools when the tide went out, and it turned my stomach so that for the last twenty-four hours I haven't eaten a mouthful."

"You poor fellow!" exclaimed Ted. He started on a run and returned a moment later with some sandwiches that Tom ate hungrily.

After this they went to their temporary home in the rocks. Delighted as they were at all being together again, they could not help feeling deeply disappointed at the vanishing of the golden dream. All those perils endured for nothing!

"Let me see that map, will you, Mr. Monet?" asked Ted.

"Here it is," replied Paul Monet listlessly, taking it from his pocket. "Might as well tear it up, though. It is—what do you Americans call it?—a false alarm."

Ted Scott studied the map closely. Then, with an excited exclamation, he jumped to his feet.

"The map's all right!" he shouted. "It's we who are all wrong!"

CHAPTER XXIV

The Treasure

Ted Scott's companions gathered about him in excitement and gazed at the line on the map at which Ted's finger was pointing.

"Look at it through the sun," read Paul Monet in a puzzled tone. He took the map from Ted and held it up to the sun.

"Reads just the same that way," he remarked in bewilderment.

"But don't you see?" exclaimed Ted. "It doesn't say, 'look at the sun through *it*.' It says, 'Look at *it* through the sun.' That is, as the sun looks through it. In other words, through the back of the map. The sun is striking it on the back, isn't it? And from the back the positions are reversed. Right becomes left and left becomes right. That arrow now indicates another part of the beach. The cave that Tom was in wasn't the right one. There must be another one. Hurrah! We're not whipped yet!"

"Great stuff, Ted!" cried Walter Hapworth,

clapping him on the back. "You've got it, sure! Looked at one way, the cave is shown to the left. Looked at the reverse way the cave is at the right. We've been barking up the wrong tree."

"Trust Ted Scott when there's thinking to be done!" exclaimed Tom Ralston admiringly.

"Isn't he a wonder?" cried Mr. Monet. "But why was the thing made so obscure when it might have been plainly stated?"

"Never mind that," chuckled Mr. Hapworth. "All we've got to think about now is to get those pearls. Let's prepare a good meal, Paul, while Ted and Tom are resting, and then we'll get to work."

Following the repast, the *Silver Streak* was once more called into scouting service. It circled about that part of the island indicated by the revised reading of the map as the general location of the cave, and at last the aviators detected it.

But barely, for the tide was rising and only about a foot of the entrance was visible above the surface of the sea. Even while the flyers watched, the water rose still higher until the entrance was at last fully covered.

It was out of the question to do anything until the tide should recede, and the attempt to enter the cave was reluctantly put off until the next low water. But it was something to have

discovered the location, and the hearts of the searchers beat high with excitement as their adventure seemed to be nearing its termination.

The cave was not as far out as the other had been, so that the swim would be shorter, but it was more dangerous and difficult, owing to the jagged rocks that beset the approach and through which the water rushed tumultuously.

"A hard swim, but we can make it," pronounced Ted.

"You bet we can!" chimed in Tom.

"Cut out that 'we' stuff, Tom," admonished Walter Hapworth. "You've done your bit and more. I'll make the attempt this time with Ted."

Tom protested, but Mr. Hapworth was adamant.

"This isn't going to be a jug-handled matter," the latter declared. "I'm going to take my share of the danger. I'm in good condition and I can swim like a fish. So that settles it. To-morrow morning will be the best time to start. But we ought to arrange beforehand what method to adopt for bringing the pearls to land, supposing we find them. You notice that I say 'supposing!' Ted and I will be stripped, so that all we could carry would be in our hands. That might be all right if we

were wading, but we'll need our hands for swimming."

"I'd thought of that," replied Ted. "That waterproof rubber bag that we have in the machine will be just the thing for that. It can be blown up so that it will float. We can attach a line to it and carry it with us. Tom and Mr. Monet will be at the other end of the line, and when we have filled the bag they can draw it in."

"Fine," exclaimed Paul Monet. "I hope the bag will be so loaded that it will be hard work to pull it along."

Early the next morning the venture was made. The stout line attached to the bag was slipped over Ted's shoulder, so that it would not interfere with the free movement of his arms, and the swimmers dived into the water.

Mr. Monet and Tom Ralston took rifles and stood on the shore. A preliminary trip in the *Silver Streak* had betrayed no presence of sharks in the vicinity, but the lesson of the day before was still vivid in the mind of each of them.

The swim proved to be an arduous one, because of the rocks and the strong currents that ran between them. It required all the strength and skill of the swimmers to keep from being dashed against the sharp, jagged edges. As it

was, they both suffered some bruises and abrasions, but of no serious nature, and after a hard battle with the waves reached the entrance of the cave.

Their hearts were beating like triphammers, not only because of their exertions but from the excitement that possessed them. Would they really find any treasure? Had it ever existed, except perhaps in the imagination of a half-crazed castaway?

Ted and his companion stretched themselves panting on the sand inside in order to recover their breath. Even after they had sufficiently rested they hesitated to move. There was a curious tug of impulses in them. They longed to find the treasure! They dreaded having hopes dashed to the ground!

While they rested, their glances searched the cave. At a distance of twenty feet or so back it seemed to end in a solid wall. At the right side of the cave, shrouded in shadows, was what appeared to be a deep pool. A fetid smell issued from it that Ted attributed to decaying seaweed.

But he forgot that when his glance fell on a few discolored oyster shells not far from him. His thoughts leaped back to the first adventurer. Had he broken those shells?

He leaped to his feet.

"Come, Walter!" he cried. "Let's put our

fortune to the test. Here's where we win or lose."

Their pulses tingling, they waded slowly out into the water. It was as clear as crystal. For some minutes they searched without result. Then when the water had about reached their waist Ted Scott gave a sharp exclamation, went under, and came up with two oysters in his hand.

"I've found them!" he shouted. "Get busy, Walter. Heave them up and into the cave."

They worked like beavers, tearing the bivalves from the bed, and did not cease until at least forty or fifty had been thrown on the sand at the entrance.

Then, wild with eagerness, they waded out and broke some of the oysters on the edges of rocks.

As the oysters were opened they fairly shouted with delight, for at least every other one of the shells concealed a pearl!

The reflections from the glorious jewels as the sun fell upon them cast shafts of light through the shadows of the cave.

The pearls varied in size, but not greatly in quality, and Ted and Mr. Hapworth knew that within arm's length they had a fortune probably worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The bed had been a small one, and they had gathered most of the oysters, though they in-

tended before they left to make a more exhaustive search.

Their delight knew no bounds. They laughed. They danced. They shouted and slapped each other on the back.

When they had regained some measure of self-control they piled the heap of shimmering pearls into the bag, tied the mouth of the bag securely, and gave the sharp tug on the line that had been agreed upon as the signal for those waiting outside to haul it in.

"Now for the swim back!" cried Walter Hapworth exultantly. "I want to see the faces of Paul and Tom."

"In just a minute," replied Ted. "Let's look at the back of the cave. Some of the oysters may have been washed back there by the tides."

They went back to what seemed a solid wall, but found no oysters, and turned back toward the entrance.

But they stopped short in their tracks and the blood froze in their veins!

Barring their progress was a great waving tentacle, thick and leathery and equipped with suckers! The tentacle of a devilfish!

CHAPTER XXV

Waving Tentacles

Horror took possession of Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth, stark, blood-curdling horror. They shrank back against the wall of the cave as that sinister arm waved to and fro.

Now other tentacles joined the first. From the noisome pool at the right of the cave emerged a horrid head with great staring eyes, a huge, horny beak, while the pulpy mass of the body upreared itself above the surface.

The fiendish eyes fixed themselves upon the intruders into its domain, and as the body heaved forward the great tentacles groped toward them.

Each knew that if one of those awful arms grasped him he would be drawn irresistibly toward the great gash of a mouth, while the horny beak would rend him into shreds.

Nearer and nearer came those waving arms. There were four of them now in sight, and each seemed eager to be the first to reach the shrinking victims.

There was no possibility of reaching the entrance, for the tentacles reached across the whole width of the cave. The doom of Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth seemed sealed. And such a doom!

Nearer and nearer those implacable arms advanced. Their tips were stretched to their utmost length, and one of them came so close that not six inches intervened between it and Ted.

Frantically, he and his companion flattened themselves against the wall, seeking to escape those terrible arms.

Then, as Ted Scott pressed back with all his might, he felt the wall of earth behind him yield. He pressed harder, and suddenly a section gave way and he fell backward into what seemed like a narrow tunnel.

He was on his feet again in an instant shouting:

"This way, Walter! This way! Quick!"

Like a flash Walter Hapworth was after Ted. And none too soon! The monster, finding that its tentacles fell short, had lunged forward, lifting its body half out of the pool, and into the hole where the weakened wall had given way came one of those horrid tentacles, weaving, groping, feeling for its prey.

But in vain, for now Ted and Mr. Hapworth were beyond its reach and had pushed their

way along a narrow passage, a natural fissure, formed perhaps by the throes of some ancient earthquake, that opened soon into a broader reach.

There they sank down with every nerve shaken by their terrible experience.

"The guardian of the cave!" panted Walter Hapworth, when he could speak.

"And right on the job," returned Ted. "We must have roused him with our shouting.

"Those fearful arms!" He shuddered. "He thinks probably that he'll get us yet."

"He can starve us to death, at any rate," muttered Mr. Hapworth gloomily.

"That at least will be a less terrible death," observed Ted. "But we're far from being dead yet. Let's see where this thing leads to."

It proved to be a heart-breaking task to make their way through the subterranean passage. It seemed to have no end. At times it broadened out so that progress was comparatively easy; at other times the passage narrowed so that they had to fight their way along and squeeze through at last with the greatest difficulty.

They had been traveling in this way for what seemed hours when something brushed roughly against Ted's face. He put up his hand to feel it and the next moment he gave an excited shout:

"It's a root, Walter, the root of a tree! We must be near the surface! Perhaps we can dig our way out!"

Using sharp pieces of rock as implements, the two tore away savagely at the dirt above their heads. They worked desperately, and in a little while a glint of light shone through.

With a wild yell of delight each redoubled his efforts and a hole sufficiently large to crawl through was soon made. Ted hoisted himself on his companion's shoulders, gripped the upper edge of the hole, and swung himself up. Then he reached down a helping hand and Walter Hapworth was safely pulled to the surface.

The fresh air! The blessed sunlight! Never had they seemed so sweet.

Both were utterly used up in mind and body, and it was fully half an hour before they could summon up strength to move. They would have waited still longer, but they knew that their friends would be consumed with anxiety over their fate.

They took a dip into the surf, for they were as black as negroes, and then hastened around the projecting hill, on the other side of which they had started their swim.

They came in sight of Mr. Monet and Tom, who were sitting on the beach, their heads in their hands, prey to the deepest anguish. Beside them lay the bag of pearls, wholly disre-

garded. With a wild whoop, Ted Scott and Mr. Hapworth rushed upon their comrades.

Then ensued a scene of joy and excitement that cannot be described.

"So the devilfish didn't get you after all!" exclaimed Tom happily, after they had recovered some measure of calmness.

"What do you know about the devilfish?" asked Ted, who had not yet had time to recount their adventure.

"I saw it," replied Tom. "When you didn't come back I swam out to look for you. The cave seemed full of those devilish tentacles, and as the tide was higher and swamped the pool the monster must have been hiding in, it slipped out and started for me. Only by swimming between the rocks where it couldn't follow, could I manage to reach the shore. Then Mr. Monet and I plugged the thing with a couple of bullets and it sank. Maybe we only wounded it, but I hope we killed it. But we thought the monstrous thing had done for you, sure."

"It almost did," replied Ted, and went on to tell of their narrow escape.

Most of the rest of that day the party spent in gloating over the pearls and estimating their value.

"A tidy little fortune for each of the four of us," exulted Mr. Monet.

"The four of us!" exclaimed Ted Scott, and the others showed equal bewilderment. "But they're yours."

"Not on—what is it you Americans say?—not on your life!" declared Paul Monet with emphasis. "All of you have risked your lives again and again to get the pearls. Into exactly four equal parts shall the money we get for them be divided. We share and share alike. And that is final."

Now that the object of their quest had been triumphantly achieved, all were aflame with eagerness to get home. They packed their supplies into the plane and thoroughly overhauled the *Silver Streak.* Ted found that he had fuel enough to carry them to Ponce, Porto Rico, where they would refuel the plane and replenish their supplies.

The next morning they took to the air and arrived at Ponce without incident. There Ted repaired to the cable office, where he found a message from Mark Lawson. It was brief and to the point:

"Warrant issued for Greg and Duck. A pal peached on them."

"So that's that!" Ted exclaimed, as he pursued his way to the air field, after despatching a message to Eben Browning telling him of

their safety and of their projected flight home.

As he rejoined his companions on the field, Ted caught sight of two figures that seemed to him somehow familiar. They were bargaining with an airman to carry them to Havana.

Ted edged his way around until he could catch a glimpse of their faces. They were those of young men, but bearded.

Their resemblance to each other, however, was striking, and Ted's vague suspicions leaped into life.

Despite their disguises, he knew that he was looking at Greg and Duck Gale!

He made his way hurriedly over to Mr. Hapworth.

"Walter," he whispered, "there are Greg and Duck Gale. You grab Duck and I'll nab Greg."

"Right!" responded Mr. Hapworth.

He and Ted pounced upon the rascals, who, though temporarily paralyzed with fright, rallied and put up a desperate resistance. But their captors' grasp could not be loosened.

An officer came hurrying up and others hastened to join him.

"Here, here, what's this?" he demanded.

"These men are robbers, fugitives from justice," declared Ted. "A warrant is out for their arrest. I demand that they be arrested

and held for return to the States. I am Ted Scott," he added.

That name was magic, and despite the protestations of the trapped scoundrels, they were hurried off to the city jail. Later Ted visited the police station, gave the details and received assurances that the scoundrels would be returned for trial.

The next day the adventurers set out for home, and with ideal flying weather to aid them arrived safely in Bromville. The welcome they received from Eben and Charity Browning and Nina Monet excelled anything in their experience. Eben tried to keep his voice steady but could not. Charity sobbed with joy, and Nina, in the kisses she showered on her uncle, spared one for Ted, which made that young man blush but was not at all unpleasant.

Ted found that one of Greg's intimates to whom, when half-tipsy, Greg had let slip some details of the robbery, had revealed enough to justify the authorities, in connection with the clubs and other circumstances, to issue a warrant for Greg's and Duck's arrest. Brewster Gale had restored to Eben the four hundred odd dollars that had been stolen from him and had made desperate but unavailing efforts to prevent the issuance of the warrant.

In due course the young scoundrels were brought back to Bromville, tried, found guilty

and sentenced to a term of several years in prison.

The pearls, when disposed of, realized a sum beyond expectations, and in accordance with Paul Monet's decision the money was equally divided among the four adventurers.

"Well, Ted," said Mr. Hapworth shortly after their return, "you've crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific, conquered the Rockies and flown over the West Indies. What next?"

"Search me," replied Ted.

THE END

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